

Du même Auteur

Livres Français

GLANES MONASTIQUES. A travers une longue vie, ou La Très Révérende Mère Claire-Isabelle de St. François, Abbessse de l'Ordre de Ste. Claire, 1828-1910. Un très beau volume in 4° de xvi-680 pages, illustré de 4 gravures hors texte. Prix net, 10 fr. 50 plus le port, par colis-postal.

FLEUR DU CLOÎTRE. (Vie très complète de la Servante de Dieu Sœur Marie-Céline de la Présentation.) Beau volume in 8° (5^e édition). Prix net, 7 frs. Suivie du premier Supplément des Prodiges et Faveurs attribués à la Servante de Dieu.

FLEUR DU CLOÎTRE. (Vie abrégée) 2 frs.

MOIS DE SAINTE COLETTE. Prix net, 1 fr. 50.

VIE ÉDIFIANTE DE SŒUR MARIE ANGÉLIQUE DE LA CROIX. Prix, 6 frs. 50 franco.

OUVRAGE COMPLET CONTENANT LA RELATION DES PRODIGES ET FAVEURS multiples attribués à la Servante de Dieu Sœur Marie-Céline de la Présentation (1897 à 1923). Prix, 7 frs.

VIE BRISÉE! ou Marie-Louise Lieury et les derniers jours d'un Monastère. Prix, 6 frs. 50 franco.

A LILY OF THE CLOISTER. 3s. 6d., 5s., 10s. 6d.

A LILY OF FRANCE; or, Sister Céline: Poor Clare. For children. With coloured illustrations. Price 1s.

Monastère de Ste Claire

125 Rue de Nimy, Mons, Belgique

B X 4705
. C 285 M 2

Sister Céline: Poor Clare



The Servant of God, Sister Marie-Céline of the Presentation.
I only seek that which is Eternal. I only long for Heaven.

Sister Céline

Poor Clare

*Or, Abridged Life of
Sister Marie-Céline of the Presentation
“A Lily of the Cloister”*

*Who died in the Odour of Sanctity at the Age of Nineteen,
in the Monastery of Saint Clare of the “Ave-
Maria,” at Bordeaux-Talence, France*

Written by a Poor Clare

*Abridged from the French Life by
R. B. M. Foster T*



BOSTON COLLEGE LIBRARY
CHESTNUT HILL, MASS,

L O N D O N

Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd.

28 Orchard Street, W. 1

8-10 Paternoster Row, E.C. 4

And . at . Manchester . Birmingham . and . Glasgow

1923

NIHIL OBSTAT:

C. SCHUT, S.T.D.,

Censor Deputatus.

IMPRIMATUR:

EDM. CAN. SURMONT

Vicarius Generalis.

WESTMONASTERII,

Die 9 Julii, 1923.

71699

Made and Printed in Great Britain.

All rights reserved.

PREFACE BY HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL BOURNE

AT the request of the Abbess of the Convent of Poor Clares formerly at Talence near Bordeaux, and now in exile in Belgium, I gladly write these few words of commendation of the English version of the life of their holy sister, Marie-Céline, who died with a high reputation for sanctity in 1897 at the age of nineteen.

God has been pleased in these later days to manifest in a special way to the world the essential simplicity of holiness, attained by close union with him, in the perfect performance of the most ordinary duties of the way of life to which a soul has been called. Such was the life of the Blessed Teresa of the Child Jesus, the wonderful little Carmelite whose virtues the Church is publicly recognizing at this moment when we write. Of similar calling and attainment would seem to be the Poor Clare Sister Marie-Céline of the Presentation, the story of whose short life is now given to us in English. There are many others; some only known in the intimacy of the family or of the cloister to which they belonged; others the fame of whose virtue is gradually becoming known more widely.

These lives have surely an immense significance

Preface

for all, both in religion and in the world; and they will most certainly be a powerful encouragement to the innumerable souls whom God is constantly inviting to closer union with himself, not by wonderful or striking deed, but by humble, persevering and untiring endeavour to accomplish with unfailing fidelity the tasks, be they easy or very hard, that constitute for each one of us the God-appointed path that we have individually to tread in order to attain the object for which we have been placed upon this earth. May this *Life*, now made available for English readers, be a fresh source of courage to all who are earnestly seeking God.

FRANCIS CARDINAL BOURNE,
Archbishop of Westminster.

LETTER FROM
HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL LECOT,
ARCHBISHOP OF BORDEAUX

ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE,
BORDEAUX,
September 24, 1897.

MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

I heartily sympathize with your desire to perpetuate the precious memory of the lamented Sister Marie-Céline.

May God bless you, and may your labours be crowned with success.

With all good wishes,

I remain, dear Daughter,
Your Superior and Father in God,
✠ V. L. C. LECOT
(*Abp. of Bordeaux*).

LETTER FROM THE MINISTER-GENERAL OF THE FRIARS MINOR

ROME,
November 16, 1897.

We are glad to add our approval to that of His Eminence the Cardinal of Bordeaux. We trust that the edifying Life of Sister Marie-Céline may stimulate Christian souls (in the cloister especially) to imitate her virtues.

FR. LOUIS LAUER
(Min.-General).

NOTE.—Many other letters of approval from eminent persons were received by the author.

DECLARATION

IN conformity with the Decree of Pope Urban VIII, the author submits without reserve the due appreciation of the facts and doctrine contained in this work to the judgement of the Holy Apostolic See and the infallible Vicar of Jesus Christ. The author also declares that in using the title of “ saint ” she does so only from an entirely human point of view, and in the same way she gives only her own private interpretation to any miraculous facts that are recorded in this narrative; in short, she submits all to the judgement of the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Church.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

ONLY a few weeks have elapsed since the fatal day which took from us our beloved Sister Marie-Céline of the Presentation, yet already on all sides we are beset by a chorus of pious voices, begging for the Life of the humble virgin who died at the age of nineteen in the odour of sanctity in a poor cell of our Monastery of Bordeaux-Talence.

The life of Sister Marie-Céline is a striking realization of Christ's words: "He that shall humble himself shall be exalted." The more she had wished to hide herself in the sweet silence of our cloisters, the more she had longed to disappear, to die to self in the humble life of the Monastery, the more has Almighty God been pleased to exalt his servant, the more brilliant has been the aureole of love, respect, and veneration, with which the friends whom she left behind her have surrounded her memory.

Her religious family can no longer turn a deaf ear to the mingled voices of pleading and praise which echoed round the tomb of their angelic Sister even when it was scarcely closed, and our superiors have judged well to yield to the petitions of the friends of our Order, who have asked for a biography of the "Angel of the Novitiate."

Author's Preface

Our charge as Mistress of Novices, which made us the intimate confidante of Marie-Céline and the privileged witness of her beautiful life, will help us in our mission as her biographer; but, alas! how powerless we feel to describe the purity, the beauty of this life, more celestial than earthly! We venture to say that Marie-Céline's life, simple and modest though it be, may in some ways be compared with that of St. John Berchmans, for God at all times rears a few lilies on the earth. Blessed and praised be his divine Heart for having deigned to sow the seed of a flower of such purity and love in the garden of our *Ave Maria*!

However unworthy we may be to trace the growth and blossoming under the eye of God of this white lily, we shall venture to attempt it with the help of obedience and the blessing of our Lady of the *Ave Maria*, Queen of Virgins.

Ad majorem Dei gloriam!

A POOR CLARE.*

From our MONASTERY OF THE "AVE MARIA" OF BORDEAUX-TALENCE, July 2, 1897, the feast of the Visitation of our Blessed Lady.

* The author, Very Reverend Mother Marie-Séraphine of the Heart of Jesus, died as Abbess at Mons (Belgium) on November 23, 1919.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE BY HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL BOURNE, ARCHBISHOP OF WESTMINSTER -	v
LETTER FROM HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL LECOT, ARCHBISHOP OF BORDEAUX - - -	vii
LETTER FROM THE MINISTER-GENERAL OF THE FRIARS MINOR - - - -	viii
DECLARATION - - - - -	ix
AUTHOR'S PREFACE - - - - -	xi
CHAPTER	
I. JEANNE-GERMAINE CASTANG - - -	1
II. A CHRISTIAN FAMILY—GERMAINE'S CHILDHOOD	4
III. GERMAINE'S CHARACTER - - -	10
IV. MARY, QUEEN AND MOTHER OF A CHRISTIAN FAMILY - - - - -	18
V. THE MOTHER'S CHARITY—THE DAUGHTER'S HEROISM—GERMAINE OFFERS HERSELF AS A VICTIM - - - - -	21
VI. GOOD-BYE TO HOME—DEATHS—SAD PARTINGS -	25
VII. A KISS OF JOY AND A KISS OF SORROW -	29
VIII. GOD ALONE - - - - -	39
IX. THE MONASTERY OF THE "AVE MARIA"— GERMAINE OBTAINS HER FATHER'S CONSENT —HER LAST INTERVIEW WITH HIM—LETTERS TO HER SISTERS - - - - -	48

Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
X. GERMAINE ENTERS THE MONASTERY OF THE “ AVE MARIA ”—HER CLOTHING—THE YOUNG NOVICE’S VIRTUES — THE RENDEZVOUS IN HEAVEN - - - - -	61
XI. MARIE-CÉLINE BEGS OF GOD TO SEND HER PAINS AND TRIALS—ILLNESS OF THE PIOUS NOVICE — PROFESSION “ IN EXTREMIS ” — HEAVENWARD—QUIET AND HUMBLE FUNERAL	69
FAVOURS ATTRIBUTED TO THE INTERCESSION OF MARIE-CÉLINE - - - - -	79

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

SISTER MARIE-CÉLINE AS A NOVICE	-	-	<i>Frontispiece</i>
GERMAINE GATHERING FLOWERS	-	<i>To face page</i>	6
SISTER MARIE-CÉLINE AT THE EVE OF HER ENTRANCE INTO THE CLOISTER		„ „	7

Sister Céline: Poor Clare;

or,

Abridged Life of Sister Marie=Céline of the Presentation

“A LILY OF THE CLOISTER,”

Who died in the odour of sanctity at the age of nineteen, in the
Monastery of Saint Clare of the “Ave Maria,”
at Bordeaux-Talence (France)

CHAPTER I

JEANNE-GERMAINE CASTANG

THERE is many a charming village in the Dordogne, but the little village of Nojals can alone claim the honour of having often been called “a little Eden.” The beautiful vineyards and rich harvest-fields which surround it, the encircling hills clothed with forest and woods, the clear and sparkling little river by which it is watered, all combine to make it a spot of rare beauty and poetic charm. But Nojals can boast of something still more precious: a deep faith and the solid virtues which are the true glory of its people.

In the midst of the village stands a modern church, built on the ruins of one far older. Just opposite is the house of Monsieur G. Castang, where, on May 24, 1878, was born Jeanne-Germaine, the fifth child of her highly favoured parents. From that moment, our Lady, Help of Christians, whose feast the Church was keeping on

A Lily of the Cloister

that day, took the little one under her special protection and began to shower upon her those graces which she was to enjoy throughout her life.

A few hours after her birth the little daughter of Monsieur G. Castang and his wife, Marie Lafage, was taken to the village church and regenerated in the holy waters of Baptism; she was given the names of Jeanne and Germaine after the two virgin-saints of Domrémy and Pibrac.

God, so good to all, was particularly so to this child of his divine predilection, and her childhood's home was all that could be desired to favour his loving designs upon her. The virtues of religion, duty, and honour were a family heritage. One day, shortly before her death, Germaine was giving me an example of her grandfather's piety.

"And your father," I asked, "is he equally pious?"

"Oh yes," she answered simply; "it is always so in our family."

M. and Mme. Castang had twelve children. None the less, in spite of the anxiety and distress to which they were often reduced by want of money, they rejoiced in the true Christian spirit over each of the little ones that were confided to their care. However, God was to claim his share in the family circle. Although Mme. Castang herself died whilst still quite young, she had the terrible grief of seeing five of her children die before her; two she lost in less than two weeks from an attack of measles. The heartbroken mother was heard to say in her bitter anguish and desolation: "Rather have a hundred children than lose a single one." At the foot of her crucifix, however, she always found divine help and consolation even in her greatest sorrows. There the *fiat* rose from her heart to her

Jeanne-Germaine Castang

lips, and she gained strength to bless and thank God who had taken her little children to join the angels in heaven.

In truth, Almighty God was the sole Master of this Christian home. The crucifix was given the place of honour. The statue of our Lady came next in love and veneration. Parents and children loved to speak of God. The first names which the little ones lisped were, "Jesus, Mary, Joseph"; the first movement their little arms learnt to make was the sign of the cross. Often Mme. Castang was seen making a big sign of the cross over the cradle of her sleeping baby. Ah! who can describe the beauty of that mother's blessings in the eyes of God? Who can tell their effect? . . . Little Germaine received her full share of these blessings, and from her earliest days she was the wonder and the joy of all around her. Gifted with precocious intelligence, of a sweet and winning disposition, already remarkably lovely, she was with reason the pride of her parents and the little favourite of her elder brothers and sisters. On her mother's knee or in her father's arms, her sweet baby smiles were the first signs of her deep filial devotion. Her eldest sister has thus described her :

"My dear little sister, with her golden curls, her large blue eyes, aglow with love and intelligence, how charming, how lovable she was! Everyone showered caresses on her, and took delight in giving her little presents. Our father and mother loved us all equally, but they had for little Germaine a more than ordinary tenderness. We were all quite aware of it, yet the dear child so well deserved it that we could not be jealous; indeed, her gentle ways, her pretty chatter, made us all love her with a very special love. . . ."

CHAPTER II

A CHRISTIAN FAMILY—GERMAINE'S CHILDHOOD

MONSIEUR AND MADAME CASTANG brought up their children with every possible care, teaching them above all to love God. Indeed, the Faith was the life of the Castang family, and so strong were their faith, hope, and charity that no trials, no tribulations could separate them from God.

It was not surprising that with such a numerous family their slender means were soon exhausted, but they did not on that account cease to practise many acts of Christian charity.

“Our house might be described as the rendez-vous of the poorest and most wretched,” writes their eldest daughter. “I never saw one of them knock at our door in vain. Once it happened that several poor people had come to the door and had all received something. A little later another poor woman came. A relation of ours, who was paying us a visit, sent her away empty-handed. As soon as my father heard of it, he sent me in pursuit of the woman, saying: ‘No one will ever be worse off for giving a penny to the poor.’”

“About midday once my father came home from his work, his face radiant with joy. ‘Children,’ he said, ‘let us kneel down and say three *Ave Marias* in thanksgiving to our Lady.’ He had just brought an important business affair to a satisfactory conclusion.

“Another time a poor woman came to the house

A Christian Family

with a half-naked baby in her arms. My mother clothed both the woman and her little child as well as she could, and sent them away comforted and happy.

“Indeed, I can truly say that our good parents never missed an opportunity of making us love and practise charity, passing on to us the lessons which they themselves had learnt in childhood at their fathers’ and mothers’ knees. In so good a school dear little Germaine was not long in acquiring habits of piety; to mamma’s great joy she had an intense love for God and deep compassion for the sufferings of others; she would pray with the greatest recollection, her eyes tightly shut and her little hands joined all the time.

“As Germaine grew older, she grew also in love and respect for our dear parents. She would rather do anything in the world than give them any trouble; on the contrary, her one idea was to help them as much as she could.

“Although only a little child herself, she wanted to be the big sister of the seven other little sisters and brothers who came after her. Such a devotion was a great help to my mother, especially as I was generally at my uncle’s home. The little Germaine made it her duty to look after all the others; although scarcely strong enough to carry the babies, she would take them up and put them to bed in order to spare her mother. I often heard mother say that when the children were left in Germaine’s care she was quite at peace and had no anxieties about them.”

Lucy, M. and Mme. Castang’s eldest daughter, was only thirteen when she heard God’s voice calling her to the religious life. Her pious parents, who loved God above all things, made the sacrifice

A Lily of the Cloister

generously, and, in spite of the pain it caused them, they accepted the holy will of God with the resignation of true Christians.

“It was very hard to nature,” writes Lucy; “it cost me a great deal to take leave of my beloved parents and all my brothers and sisters . . . most of all it broke my heart to say good-bye to my darling little Germaine, who was about eight years old. It was as though I had a presentiment that we should never meet again on earth.”*

To Lucy we owe the following details of little Germaine's early days :

“When we were playing in the fields near the little river that flowed through Nojals, Germaine was fond of gathering flowers. Sometimes she would sit down on the grass and ask the daisies whether she was to be a nun, stripping off the petals to obtain an answer. At other times we would weave garlands of white daisies and blue corn-flowers, or make fresh bouquets, and bring them with joy and love to our Lady's altar.”

Germaine's childhood was not, however, without a cross. When she was only four years old, a terrible accident befell her. It was an afternoon in spring; the weather was fine, but still very cold; school was over, and a merry band of boys and girls were running joyously through the fields, awakening the echoes with their gay young voices. Germaine and her brothers were amongst the number. They were all delighted at having escaped from the blackboard and lesson-book into the bright sunshine and beautiful fields and flowers; jumping and running, clapping their hands, singing and laugh-

* Lucy entered the Congregation of the Nuns of St Joseph d'Aubenas (Ardèche), and received the name of Sister Mary of St Germain.



House and Birthplace of Sister Marie-Céline. 1878

Church of Nojals, where she was baptized

Little Germaine gathering Daisies, asking the little flower whether
she would be a nun or not.



Sister Marie-Céline of the Presentation
on the eve of her entrance into the Cloister.
As we are going to God, it is better to give ourselves
entirely to Him.

Germaine's Childhood

ing joyously, they came to the banks of the little river.

“ Shall we cross the rivulet ? ” one of them boldly asked.

“ Yes, yes, ” was the general answer.

No sooner said than done. Shoes and stockings were taken off in less time than it takes to tell, and all were prepared to enter the rivulet. Germaine was no less ready and eager than the other children. Quickly she took off her little shoes and woollen stockings and stepped into the cold water. The children held each other's hands, and with merry laughter they jumped and splashed in the water. It was so delightful a game that they forgot all about crossing the river to the opposite bank. How long they would have remained it is impossible to say, if a woman from Nojals had not chanced to pass by. She ordered them all out of the water.

“ Come out at once, you naughty little children, ” she cried ; and with a good scolding she sent them all to their homes.

As she knew the Castangs very well, she took Germaine's hand and made the boys walk in front of her, scolding them as they went along.

Perhaps it was due to this good woman that all the children did not feel the bad effects of paddling in such cold water at so late an hour. Little Germaine, whose constitution was probably more delicate than that of the others, did not escape. As she herself has told us, she was extremely hot when she left the schoolroom, which was heated by a large stove, “ and my feet were very warm, for I had thick woollen stockings, ” she said, “ and so I found the water terribly cold. ”

Soon after this the poor child fell into a kind of torpor, which caused her parents much anxiety.

A Lily of the Cloister

Even at school she used to fall asleep on the floor. The good Sisters were alarmed.

"Surely the child is ill," they said to one another; and they redoubled their care, for they loved her very much.

To see their darling Germaine in such a state was a new and heavy trial for M. and Mme. Castang; but if they asked her what was the matter, she simply answered that her legs hurt her. Gradually, however, the left leg became paralyzed up to the knee, and this was only the beginning of worse troubles. Soon the poor child began to limp. Her good parents, in their distress, consulted the doctors, and did all in their power to discover a remedy, but they were told that nothing could be done.

Like all the other inhabitants of Nojals, M. and Mme. Castang had a special devotion to St Anne, the Patron of Christian families, so in their great affliction they turned to her and begged her to have pity on their child. On a little hill overhanging the south side of Nojals is the picturesque hamlet of Clottes, with its ancient chapel dedicated to St Anne. Though unpretentious and simple in style, this little chapel is a much-frequented place of pilgrimage, especially on July 26, when the saint's feast is solemnly celebrated.

A holy priest advised M. and Mme. Castang to ask God, by the intercession of St Anne, for a miracle, the cure of their little daughter, on the day dedicated to the saint. All was arranged, and the news spread rapidly in Nojals and the neighbourhood. As a result, on July 26, a devout and sympathetic crowd filled the little church. Many eyes were filled with tears when the officiating priest, in the presence of the blessed Sacrament ex-

Germaine's Childhood

posed, prayed aloud for the child's cure. But in vain! St Anne would not listen to the petition, and some years later at Lourdes our blessed Lady likewise refused to obtain the cure. It was God's holy will that Germaine should carry this cross all the days of her life; it was for her good and her sanctification.

CHAPTER III

GERMAINE'S CHARACTER

GOD spoke to the heart of Germaine from her earliest years. His voice drew her soul to the tabernacle, where she gazed earnestly at her Beloved, murmuring the while sweet prayers of confidence and love; she was indeed a delicate blossom for the divine prisoner of Nojals. Day and night she charmed his loneliness by her innocent childhood, which preceded a still more angelic girlhood. Now the Tabernacle of Eternity holds this pure and perfect flower whom we loved to call "The Lily of Nojals."

Those who knew Germaine had a presentiment that she was not long for this earth. Scarcely had she reached the age of reason when she consecrated her whole being to God, devoting her life generously to others for the love of him who was her all.

The first field of her heroism was her own home, where she nursed and tended her younger brothers and sisters.

From her infancy Germaine had been influenced by the heroic virtues of her holy mother, who was so perfect that people regarded her as a saint. From her the child learnt to accept the trials of life as precious splinters of the cross of Jesus, to say the *fiat* of resignation and the *amen* of acceptance of the will of God.

She was never known to murmur, even in the midst of physical pain; she nailed herself to the

Germaine's Character

cross so thoroughly that one may say "she was a burning victim of divine Love."

Germaine readily learnt also from her holy mother to overcome her impulsive nature, to conquer and sacrifice self for others. At times, however, human nature asserted itself, and it happened more than once that Germaine was afraid of appearing before her mother after some bit of mischief. Amusing anecdotes are related by our heroine.

"One Corpus Christi, after having prayed earnestly during the procession, I was still clothed in white, when a young shepherdess asked me to pick raspberries with her. Immediately my little white dress became a basket, and was soon filled with the delightful ripe fruit. Guess the state I was in! To go home seemed impossible, to face my mother seemed still more impossible. But darkness was falling around us, so I hastened home and crept in at the back door. Very soon I was hidden in bed, still wearing my so-called 'white dress.' It was night. My father and brothers were searching for me. My poor mother, after having looked vainly everywhere, came into my bedroom. Her eyes fell upon her little girl's bed. 'Could this be the hiding-place?' said she. Terrified, I could not utter a word! 'Germaine, are you there?' No answer. Quickly the sheets and blankets were thrown down, and lo! there I was in my raspberry-stained dress. To jump out of bed and be at my mother's knees was the work of a moment. I was ready to accept any punishment. My mother did not spare me, for she wished to impress upon my mind that God sees us wherever we are. That evening I went to sleep without any supper."

Another word-picture of our little saint :

A Lily of the Cloister

“ It was the village feast of Beaumont,” says she. “ Punch and Judy were harvesting heaps of money at the ‘ Assemblée.’ My brother and myself longed to join the happy children who went to Beaumont. Oh, to see Punch ! to hear Punch ! What would we not do ! Great was our joy when our parents granted our request, on one condition, that we returned early. Off we started, and to evade all authority we kept to ourselves. We raced to the ‘ Assemblée,’ and, breathless, we exclaimed : ‘ Punch ! we want to see Punch !’ Disappointment had also raced with us. ‘ Punch ? Punch is only shown at nine o’clock in the evening,’ was the answer. Alas ! it was but four o’clock, and already the dusk of evening was falling. Nevertheless, Punch I would see in spite of my little brother, who felt rather anxious, as it was getting quite dark. ‘ We must stay to see Punch, for Punch I must see,’ said I. Soon all anxiety was dispelled. Punch was beating his wife, she was beating him ; the clown, the ghost, the policeman, even the dog, brought screams of laughter from everybody. Hours were speeding along joyfully and delightfully, when at the stroke of midnight Punch disappeared, leaving two little children alone in the dark. What were we to do ? Our home was at some distance from Beaumont. Huge trees like terrible phantoms stood in our way, but home must be reached. My poor little brother helped me across woods and roads. At last we reached Nojals. Timidly we knocked at our father’s door. No answer. Gaining courage, we knocked louder and louder, until a regular hammering at the door awoke the whole household. ‘ I say, I say,’ shouted my father, ‘ who’s there ?’ Trembling, and in broken tones, we answered : ‘ We are !’ ‘ What do you

Germaine's Character

mean?' cried M. Castang, terrified on seeing his children in the street at such an hour. 'Yes, it is we, and we have come back. . . .' 'Where do you come from?' 'We have come back from Punch and Judy! . . .' Naturally, we were taken in, but on the following morning our mother punished us very severely. It was her custom to meet every fault with a good penance in order to help us not only to make amends for our faults, but to help us to avoid them in the future.'*

The preceding incidents prove that Germaine was not lacking in courage. Even her brothers recognized her valour. When they planned the destruction of a swarm of wasps, it was Germaine who began the assault; armed with a reed, it was she who struck the first blow. Never mind if she was stung by the wasps—she must before all be brave!

With the high spirits and almost reckless courage of a boy, Germaine, at seven years old, did not hesitate to arm herself with a gun belonging to her father in order to intimidate one of her elder brothers who refused to agree with her. This little story is of sufficient interest to be given at length. We have it from Germaine herself, who told it one day in order to prove to us "how naughty" she was. It must have been the greatest sin, perhaps the *one* great sin of her life.

Here, then, is what happened twelve years ago in M. Castang's peaceful home:

Germaine was playing with one of her brothers when an argument arose between them. At first, it was all in fun; then it became serious. They

* Although the children did not return in the evening, M. and Mme. Castang were not anxious about them; they believed them to be with one of their aunts, who invited them to her house nearly every Sunday and often kept them until Monday morning.

A Lily of the Cloister

could not agree at all. Germaine, who had no doubt the best of reasons, did her best to convince her brother. . . . But no; he held obstinately to his opinion and refused to give way. Germaine was equally determined. Her eyes became angry and threatening; her brother grew more proud and resolute than ever. The little boy, standing well in front of his sister, was shouting angrily and declaring that he would never yield.

“And I say yes,” said Germaine.

“And I say no,” answered her brother.

It was too much! Germaine was determined to win the battle, but how? Words were not enough; there must be another way of intimidating her adversary, but how could she find it? Suddenly an idea struck Germaine. She knew where her father's gun was hanging. It was a big gun, and she was very little. Never mind! She would manage to get hold of it somehow; and when she returned, armed with such a weapon, her brother would take flight, victory would be hers. To carry out her plan, Germaine abruptly left her brother and ran to take down the gun. It was not an easy task. However, Germaine took her time; she climbed on to a cupboard, seized the weapon, and drew it down until it was safely within her arms. One trembles to think of the terrible tragedy which might have occurred if the gun had been loaded! Fortunately it was not, and Germaine was able to use it without danger. And so, carrying this formidable weapon, though with some difficulty, the little girl returned to her brother. She had no idea of wounding him, her dear little brother—oh no! she only wanted to frighten him well and make him run away.

One may imagine the little boy's terror when he

Germaine's Character

saw Germaine standing in the doorway, armed with such a weapon. In his fright he screamed to his mother for help, and ran as fast as he could, knocking down everything that stood in his path. Mme. Castang, attracted by the tumult, came out of the room where she was working, and met her panic-stricken little boy, who was expecting every moment to be shot. Germaine was following, dragging her gun after her, and rejoicing in its happy effect. Her triumph was short-lived. Mme. Castang seized the little warrior and took the gun from her hands. Then, speaking very severely, she made her understand the danger to which she would have exposed herself and her little brother if the gun had been loaded, and what terrible remorse she would have suffered if, instead of merely frightening her brother, she had killed him. Quite taken aback by her own audacity, Germaine began to cry bitterly, and begged her little brother to forgive her. On his side, he asked pardon for his share in the quarrel; peace was made and sealed by an affectionate kiss.

However, things were not to end there, and Germaine had not yet come to the end of her humiliations. Her mother, who felt quite anxious as to what length her daughter's high spirits would go, resolved to impose a public humiliation. The next day, therefore, she took Germaine by the hand and went with her to school. She entered her classroom, and in presence of all the pupils described the escapade of the preceding day. . . . When Mme. Castang had finished speaking, the good Sister, the mistress of the class, clasped her hands and exclaimed: "Well, fancy that—a little sister trying to kill her little brother!"

At these words Germaine was ready to die of

A Lily of the Cloister

shame. Well scolded, humiliated, and covered with confusion in the presence of her companions, her bitter sobs bore evidence to her perfect contrition. Poor little Germaine! how many tears flowed that day from her large blue eyes, and how many humiliations she accepted in silence! It was a good lesson; from this moment the solid virtue of humility took root within her heart. It grew rapidly under her mother's watchful eye.

Let us give another example of the wise firmness of the mother.

One day Germaine and her little brothers saw some beautiful fruit hanging over a garden wall; they gathered it quickly, and ran home to their mother, sure of her admiration and approval.

"Who has given you this fruit, my children?" asked their mother, with some surprise.

"No one, mother," answered Germaine.

"We gathered it ourselves," added one of her brothers.

"You gathered it yourselves? Little thieves!" exclaimed Mme. Castang indignantly. "You have taken what did not belong to you!" Quite displeased, she continued: "Go at once and find the owner of the orchard. You must kneel down before him and acknowledge your theft, and beg him to forgive you; then you must give back to him what you have stolen."

It was a severe order, but the children did not hesitate to obey. This adventure, followed by so humiliating a confession, left such an indelible mark on their memories that ever after they respected the belongings of others.

It was by these practical methods that Mme. Castang instructed her children.

Germaine's good and generous nature joyfully

Germaine's Character

accepted such a training. She loved all that was beautiful, true, and just; she was grateful to her parents for showing her the path of duty.

During her novitiate she was once asked what she thought of her mother's corrections. "I thought she was quite right," answered the young novice simply; and this soul, so vigorously disciplined, felt the deepest gratitude towards those who had humiliated her by correcting her faults. "Humility marches at the head of all the virtues."*

* St John Chrysostom.

CHAPTER IV

MARY, QUEEN AND MOTHER OF A CHRISTIAN FAMILY

THE kind nuns who were at Nojals were ever ready to help Mme. Castang in bringing up her family. They soon recognized in Germaine a child of predilection, and they lavished upon her all their care and tender affection. "On her side, Germaine was quite at home with the good Sisters," says Sister Mary of St Germain, "talking and amusing herself with them, as she would have done with us. It was her delight to pass a whole day in their company, sharing their walks and meals, which she enlivened with her childish prattle." Let us quote a passage from a letter written by one of the nuns to Sister Mary of St Germain, shortly after Germaine's death :

NOJALS,
June, 1897.

"MY DEAR SISTER,

"The death of your dear Sister Marie-Céline makes you very sad; it is quite natural, for you loved her so much. With all our hearts we share your deep sorrow, and we grieve over the loss of the dear, simple child. She was so natural, so attractive, that it was a real pleasure to talk to her. Often she used to say : 'I want to die a religious; if I do not enter your Congregation, then I will enter an enclosed Order.' Her wish has been fulfilled. Whilst still quite young she loved our community life, and whenever she could she would come

Mary, Queen and Mother of a Christian Family

to us, for here she felt perfectly happy and at home. She loved her mistress, and in return they loved her very dearly. Indeed, we were all very fond of the fervent child, and we shall never forget her.

“SISTER N., *Religious of St Joseph.*”

The darling of the Sisters of Nojals was indeed everyone's darling. Grace shone on Germaine's face as dew sparkles on the flowers in the morning. Friends who came to visit Mme. Castang would beg to take the little girl to their own homes for a few days. Mme. Castang, whose character was essentially reserved and delicately discreet, feared lest her child should take too much pleasure in these excursions. Even before her children could be said to have reached the age of reason, she had begun to teach them the strictest rules of good behaviour. Sometimes she would speak directly to Germaine; sometimes in the child's hearing she would say to her husband: “What a forward child! I really believe she could make six cavaliers dismount from their horses!”

On hearing these words, Germaine cast down her eyes and was silent and confused. But she profited from such lessons, for modesty and reserve, so perfect that they may be described as angelic, were to be amongst the most striking moral beauties of the “Angel of the Novitiate.”

“And what had you done,” I asked her one day, “that led your mother to say that you could make six cavaliers come down from their horses?” Very simply she answered: “I liked to say ‘How do you do?’ to everyone.” Happy are the mothers who bring up their children in this way!

We believe that it was in her special devotion to our blessed Lady that this good mother found

A Lily of the Cloister

the secret of the perfect education she gave her children. She consecrated each child to the blessed Virgin, and neglected nothing to develop in them all a true filial devotion to their divine Mother. It was a custom in the family to say the Rosary in common, and it was in the Rosary that M. Castang was to find his sweetest consolation after the death of his wife.

The *Ave Marias* of the Rosary said in common in a family are the golden links of a chain which binds the hearts of children to the earthly home before uniting them to their heavenly country.

Yes, the *Ave Maria* is indeed a consolation. We love to say it again and again; how sad life would be without it! *Ave Maria*—these two words of love are one of our last exclamations in this valley of tears. . . . They must be . . . I like to think it . . . one of the eternal exclamations of the immortal soul in Paradise.

In the Castang family our blessed Lady had been especially honoured under the title of our Lady of Perpetual Succour ever since the day when she had saved Mme. Castang from what appeared to be imminent death. Since then our Lady of Perpetual Succour was blessed and invoked by the whole household. Every day there was a prayer in her honour, and another to our Lady of Seven Dolours. Germaine joined in saying these prayers. Later on, at Talence, Germaine was to be the special protégée of our Lady of Seven Dolours; she was to live under the very shadow of her sanctuary, and she was to draw her last breath facing a large picture of our Lady of Perpetual Succour, who, as we piously believe, appeared to her at her last hour under the form of a “beautiful lady.”

CHAPTER V

THE MOTHER'S CHARITY—THE DAUGHTER'S HEROISM—GERMAINE OFFERS HERSELF AS A VICTIM

IN character Germaine was an exact image of her pious mother. She had the same sound judgment, tact—above all, the same generous heart and boundless charity. To speak of Mme. Castang's virtues is to speak of the virtues of her beloved daughter.

A few days before her death Sister Marie-Céline gave us a wonderful example of her mother's Christ-like devotion.

"I feel sure," she said, "that our Lord must have richly rewarded my mother for an heroic act of charity which I witnessed." And she told us what follows. Not far from her parents' house there lived a family with which they had at one time been on friendly terms, but with which after a time, for reasons which Sister Marie-Céline could not remember, all intercourse was broken off. Now, Mme. X. had a tiny baby whom she was unable to feed herself; the little one was visibly failing, and his face was covered with unsightly sores. The poor mother in her distress came to Mme. Castang and besought her to have pity on her and save the baby's life, asking her to suckle the child herself. Mme. Castang looked at the sick infant with the tenderest compassion, went and asked for her husband's consent, and then came back to the heart-broken mother. Silently she took the poor baby

A Lily of the Cloister

into her arms, and without showing the slightest sign of disgust promised the mother that she would take as much care of him as if he were her own child. Indeed, she kept her word, and, needless to say, to the mother's great joy, the baby grew into a splendid child. Mme. Castang certainly loved her neighbour as herself for the love of God. Kindness, generosity, and gratitude were the flowers that flourished at all seasons in the Castang family.

"My father and my mother were so good to everyone," said Germaine; "they would deprive themselves of all sorts of things, even at times the most necessary things, to give them to anyone towards whom they felt gratitude."

We are now reaching a new phase in Germaine's life. Although not yet ten years old, already we find her weeping bitterly over the crosses which Almighty God sent to those whom she loved so much. For several years she witnessed, and to the depths of her heart shared in, the martyrdom of her dear parents. But she would do more: she would give such a proof of filial love that it alone might serve to immortalize her. No longer a child, but a heroine, Germaine *offered herself as a victim* to Almighty God, begging him to put a term to the great trials under which her people at the time laboured.

"It was by my little sister's letters," writes Sister Mary of St Germain, "that I could appreciate the goodness, the generosity of her heart, the courage of her soul in times of trial. Only an ardent love for Jesus in the blessed Sacrament could have produced such fruit!"

Before coming to settle finally at Bordeaux, the Castangs spent about two years in a little hamlet

The Daughter's Heroism

near Nojals. To leave the little church in which she had been baptized, to say good-bye to the dear Sisters of St Joseph whom she loved so much, was a painful sacrifice for Germaine. The child's schooldays at Nojals were over, but God was calling her to another school, the school of Calvary.

Germaine was eleven years old when her parents decided to remove to Bordeaux, in the hope of finding work and earning the bread so necessary for their large family. But one more little incident which took place before they left the Dordogne must be referred to, as it illustrates Germaine's patience and strength of character.

A neighbour, who gave much care to his strawberry-beds, one day discovered that the fruit had all been stolen. As he had given permission to Germaine and her little brothers and sisters to walk in his garden, he sprang to the conclusion that it must be she who had stolen his strawberries. Nothing was further from the truth. However, boiling over with anger, he came to Mme. Castang, and was much pleased to find Germaine with her mother. He said that his strawberries had been stolen, and Germaine must be the culprit. Very much surprised, Mme. Castang asked Germaine if she had really taken the strawberries. But without giving the child time to speak, the man interrupted angrily : " Do you expect her to say that she took them ? Why, if her mouth was still full of strawberries, she would say it was not true." Germaine had never told a lie in her life, and to hear herself called both a thief and a liar was a bitter humiliation for her proud and noble nature, all the more painful to bear because it was undeserved—she was innocent. . . . However, she bowed her head and was silent. Later on she acknowledged : "*I suffered*

A Lily of the Cloister

much interiorly, and if I did not answer, it was out of respect for my mother, who was present."

So great was this child's respect for her mother that in her presence she did not dare to give free vent to her feelings and indignation. This simple and touching scene recalls to us the wonderful silence of the divine Victim on the day of his Passion. . . . "Jesus held his peace, and answered nothing. . . . *Ille tacebat et nihil respondit. . . .*"*

* St Mark xiv 61.

CHAPTER VI

GOOD-BYE TO HOME—DEATHS—SAD PARTINGS

IT was not without a feeling of deep sadness that the Castangs left the smiling fields of the Dordogne to imprison themselves in a narrow lodging in the great city of Bordeaux. There is, indeed, nothing more painful than to say good-bye to one's birthplace, the scene of so many joys and so many sorrows. But M. and Mme. Castang had many children, and in order to provide bread for them all, they had to find employment as soon as possible. Moreover, Germaine was in urgent need of medical treatment and careful nursing. The poor child was suffering from a wound in her leg; her foot was deformed, and she was walking on her ankle. It was more than time for an operation.

The Castangs rented a very modest apartment in the quarter of St Genès. When the landlord saw them arrive, he was not more surprised than delighted by the group of charming children of every age. "I congratulate you, M. Castang," he exclaimed; "you have the most charming family in Bordeaux."

During one of the last days of her life, when she was lying on her deathbed, Sister Marie-Céline described to us this enthusiastic reception, and we asked her whether she was prettier or not than her brothers and sisters.

"I do not know," she answered simply, "for I have never seen myself."

These words reveal how modesty and humility

A Lily of the Cloister

were the inseparable companions of this young virgin : *she had never seen herself.*

Yes, it was the sweet simplicity of the dove which shone in Germaine's open and beautiful face ; it was the purity of her soul which reflected itself in her large eyes, so limpid, so modest, that no one could see Germaine without being drawn to her by the charm of her innocence.

The dear child was examined by one of the doctors of the Children's Hospital in the rue Bayonne, and on February 7, 1891, she was given a bed in the surgical ward. Good Sister Adelaide—a religious of St Vincent de Paul—greeted the gentle sufferer with motherly affection, and at once became the friend and consoler of the family in its trials.

Germaine had to undergo an operation for club-foot. She received this news with perfect calm, and when an anæsthetic was given her to “ put her to sleep ” her wonderful courage never flinched. The operation was successfully performed ; the little patient's foot was put right, and henceforth she could stand upright, whilst the difficulty which she had previously experienced in walking was lessened.

“ I would have liked not to wake, but to go to Heaven,” were the little invalid's first words when she came to after the operation.

Germaine was nursed with a devotion which is beyond all praise. Doctors and nurses all took an interest in her. As soon as she was convalescent she begged the Sisters to let her help them by taking care of the other little invalids in the surgical ward ; it seemed as if she could not do enough to prove her gratitude. Sister Adelaide used to sound the praises of her little patient : “ She was very brave,

Deaths

very intelligent; she had such good sense, such delicacy, and a patience quite beyond her age. She prayed so well and said the Rosary so piously that the other children used to say to one another: 'Look at Germaine, how well she prays!' Then all the other little invalids would join their hands and close their eyes, '*to do like Germaine.*'"

Whilst Germaine was edifying the surgical ward, her parents endured a new trial; four of their children caught the measles. The doctor forbade Mme. Castang to look after her sick children herself, as she was at that time nursing her youngest child, a baby girl. The children were therefore sent to the same hospital, and although every possible care was lavished on them by the Sisters of Charity, two of them died in ten to twelve days' time. It was on this occasion that Germaine heard her mother say in her deep grief: "Rather have a hundred children than lose a single one."

This sorrow was quickly followed by a new anxiety; the life of their son Louis, who was twenty-two years of age, was now threatened. During his military service he slept one night on damp straw; on rising next morning he was seized with a strange pain; bronchitis developed, and the disease attacked his lungs. This young man was with good reason the joy and pride of his family. With a heart of gold and a frank, loyal nature, with tender natural feelings and true filial affection, Louis was also a first-rate workman, devoted to the interests of his family, and a staunch Christian, devoted to his religion. In fact, he was a model young man, a worthy son of the "holy Mme. Castang," and worthy brother of the "angelic Germaine."

To be separated from their dear little Germaine was another and not the least of her parents' trials.

A Lily of the Cloister

It had to be, however. Her education, hardly begun, had been abruptly broken off by the trials of the last few years. It had now to be resumed, and, more important than all else, she must be prepared for her first Communion. A charitable lady, who took a great interest in Germaine's future, arranged for her to enter the school at Nazareth House. To Mme. Castang it seemed as though one of the few remaining rays of joy and hope was to leave the home; but God claimed this sacrifice, and it was therefore decided that Germaine should go to Nazareth a few weeks after leaving the hospital.

CHAPTER VII

A KISS OF JOY AND A KISS OF SORROW

GERMAINE was a little over thirteen when she entered the school of Nazareth. Her heart was divided between joy and sorrow : sorrow when she thought of the grief of her dearly-loved parents ; joy when she beheld the tabernacle, from which the God of her first Communion was so soon to come to her, for she firmly believed that, nourished with the Bread of Life, she would be strong enough to bear any trials. Burning with love for the sacred Host, whom she was longing to receive, humble, simple, recollected, Germaine charmed both mistresses and pupils. One of the nuns gives the following description :

“ From the first day of her arrival at Nazareth Germaine was an example for all the other children. She was wonderfully charitable to her companions ; anyone who wanted a little service turned naturally to Germaine, for they all knew how pleased she was to be able to do something for others, and the only reward for which she would ever ask was a little prayer that she might learn to work well. It sometimes happened that when Germaine was slow in understanding a lesson on her manual work, she would receive a sharp scolding from the companion whose duty it was to teach her ; tears might come to her eyes in thinking of the trouble which she was giving to others, but not a single word ever escaped her lips. Knowing that prayer can do all things, she used to beg for St Joseph’s help that she might

A Lily of the Cloister

learn quickly and so make some return for all the trouble which she thought she was giving, and also that she might be able to help by her needlework the good Mother St Pierre, who had received her so kindly. No wonder that she was not long in gaining everyone's affection and esteem.

"Her companions called Germaine 'the angel of the workroom' and 'the angel of peace.' At the slightest call of duty or to any spot where an act of kindness was to be done, she would run with a glad smile upon her lips. Very often she was the little advocate of her companions with their mistresses, even going so far as to ask to be allowed to do a penance in place of the culprit.

"But Germaine desired above all else to please God. One of her favourite occupations was to adorn with flowers a little statue of St Joseph or a picture of our Lady which she had constantly before her.

"So ardent was her longing to belong entirely to Mary that our dear Mother allowed her as a special privilege to join the children of Mary even before her first Communion; she had the great joy of being received into the association as an 'aspirant.'

"Meanwhile Germaine was preparing herself with the most fervent love to receive Jesus in the blessed Sacrament. The study of her catechism was her most engrossing occupation. When the examination day arrived, she felt no fear; placing all her confidence in St Joseph, whose little statue she clasped tightly in her hand, she answered all the examination questions with success."

Germaine's retreat for her first Communion was most edifying; she wished to have no recreation, but devote all her time to prepare for the great event. It came at last, the day so ardently desired; it

A Kiss of Joy and a Kiss of Sorrow

was June 12, 1892, the feast of Corpus Christi. Radiantly happy, perfectly calm, penetrated with respect, and burning with love, Germaine for the first time received her Jesus. In the evening, to close that beautiful day, she made her consecration to Mary, and placed under the protection of that good Mother all her fervent resolutions. What deep emotions stirred the child's soul, what tears of joy and happiness she shed ! It was indeed, as she said herself, the most beautiful day of her life. And it was also a happy day for her dear father ; when she received his good-night kiss, he told her that he was very pleased with his little Germaine, because she had been throughout the day the most modest, the most serious, and the most recollected of all the little first Communicants.

The graces of her first Communion were soon followed by those of Confirmation. Germaine was confirmed in the Cathedral of Bordeaux ; she received the name of Clare, the first foreshadowing of her future vocation as a Poor Clare. One may well believe that from that hour St Clare of Assisi surrounded with special solicitude and protection the chosen child who was so soon to wear the seraphic livery and die a professed religious of her Order.

Nourished with the "living Bread from Heaven," enlightened with the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the little virgin offered her innocent heart to her divine Lord, and ceaselessly implored him for the great grace of a religious vocation. The touch of the sacred Host had left its impress on her soul, and her one longing was to follow her Jesus, to follow him in the mysteries of a life of virginity and love. The sacred oil of Confirmation had marked her brow, and henceforth the only crown for which she cared was one of roses and of thorns. Can our

A Lily of the Cloister

divine Lord ever refuse a petition made on the first Communion day? Above all, could he reject the prayer of so pure a heart? Oh no! Before long Germaine was to sing in the cloister the *Magnificat* of her thanksgiving; on the fourth anniversary of her first Communion day she was to cross the threshold of the *Ave Maria*.

But before granting the desires of his little servant, God sent her a very heavy trial. The joys of the first eucharistic embrace were seen to be changed into the sorrows of the divine embrace of suffering; the year 1892 was to close in the deepest of mourning.

Soon after her first Communion Germaine had the pain of being separated from her parents. They were advised by prudent friends to leave Bordeaux, where from the first they had met with misfortunes, and so, when M. Castang was offered a position of trust on a large estate in the neighbourhood of the Réole, he hastened to accept. The new home to which he moved with his family was on a magnificent property belonging to a fine château, but for M. Castang it was to become a new Calvary. It was here that he was to close his wife's eyes and receive his son Louis's last breath.

During the course of the year (1892) no one could have foreseen the sorrow which December was to bring. Mme. Castang seemed to be strong and in good health. In reality she was suffering from an internal disease which she courageously tried to hide.

On December 29, when getting out of a carriage, she was suddenly seized with illness. "I am dying!" she exclaimed. Every care was bestowed on her, but all in vain; nothing could save her life. She begged for a picture of our Lady of Per-

A Kiss of Joy and a Kiss of Sorrow

petual Succour, which some years before had miraculously restored her to life; someone ran to fetch it, but the precious picture could not be found. The time had come for her to see our blessed Lady, not merely in a picture, but in all the glorious reality of Heaven. She was only forty-one, but her days in this world were over; in spite of every loving attention, the best remedies, fervent prayers, Mme. Castang died. . . .

His son Louis was dying, now his wife was dead, and it seemed for the moment as though M. Castang would be crushed by this overwhelming blow. However, he implored our Lord to give him help and strength, and then he sent a telegram to Germaine.

It was evening when the telegram reached Nazareth Monastery, and the good Sisters thought it would be better to wait till morning before breaking the sad news to Germaine. The following day, therefore, one of them said to her: "My child, I have very bad news for you."

"Oh!" cried Germaine; "my brother Louis, is he dead?"

"No," answered the Sister, but she could get no further.

Germaine begged her to speak, and the poor Sister, who was weeping herself, had to tell the truth. . . .

Germaine burst into tears; it seemed as though her heart was broken. She asked to go home at once, in the hopes of seeing her mother's face once more and being present at the funeral. As the journey was short, she was allowed to go, and she took her passage on the little boat that started at two o'clock in the afternoon. A kind lady who was travelling on the same boat was deeply touched at

A Lily of the Cloister

the sight of this young girl, crying so bitterly. She asked Germaine where she was going, what was the matter, why was she so sad? When Germaine told her that she had lost her mother, and was going home to look for the last time on that dear mother's face, her new friend tried to console her by her kind words; and when they got off the boat she invited her to come to her house. At first Germaine refused, for she wanted to reach home as quickly as possible, but the boat had been delayed, and it was already seven o'clock. The short December day had drawn to a close, and it was too late for a young girl to set off alone for an hour's walk.

Germaine therefore yielded to the persuasions of this kind friend, and returned with her to her home. The lady's two daughters welcomed her with the utmost sympathy. They gave her a place at the family table and made her take a little food. After supper one of them took her up to the room that had been prepared for her; she kissed her, and did all she could to comfort her. Germaine was deeply touched by such a reception; in the midst of her tears she tried to thank her friends, but she could find no words in which to express her gratitude. Poor child! her grief would have touched even the hardest heart. And yet she never lost her self-possession, her perfect resignation to the holy will of God.

The next morning the young lady who had been so kind the evening before again came to Germaine's room. She brought her her breakfast in bed, and said that as soon as she was ready her brother-in-law would drive her to her father's house. Germaine was quite overwhelmed by this fresh proof of kindness, and tried once more to thank her good friend. As she was saying good-bye, she drew out

A Kiss of Joy and a Kiss of Sorrow

her little purse, but they would not hear of accepting anything; they only asked her to give them one more kiss.

Even on her deathbed Germaine used to speak with emotion and deep gratitude of this wonderful charity and hospitality. The brother-in-law pulled up his horse at a short distance from M. Castang's house; probably he wished to remain unknown and avoid the thanks of Germaine's family.

So the poor child, trembling from head to foot, got down from the carriage and was soon before the door of the house. But it was too late. As she was crossing the threshold, a kind neighbour stopped her and told her that the funeral had already begun in the church. We can imagine what a cruel disappointment it was for Germaine! She hastened to the church, and there, through the tears which half-blinded her, she could see her mother's coffin, her grief-stricken father and his children kneeling near it . . . the priest at the altar saying Mass for the dead, and a number of sympathetic friends who were assisting at it. . . .

As though turned to stone, Germaine remained standing at the bottom of the church . . . then she knelt on a prie-dieu, weeping bitterly, her eyes fixed on the funeral pall which covered the coffin of her beloved mother. . . . It happened that one of her little sisters turned round and saw her.

"Papa, there's Germaine," she said aloud.

M. Castang was deeply moved when he saw Germaine. He made a sign to her to come; and, kneeling down beside him, she joined her prayers and tears with his for the repose of the beloved soul of her whose poor body was resting in the coffin hidden from their eyes. She begged Almighty God to give strength to her father, and implored our Lady to be

A Lily of the Cloister

a Mother to them all; she consecrated her brothers and sisters to her who is with reason called the "hope of the hopeless." Then, with renewed courage, she followed to the cemetery the mortal remains of the mother "who was beloved by all because she knew how to forget herself for all."*

"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."†

Such was the prayer of this sorely tried family. Oh! how much they needed the God of all consolation!

Having returned from the cemetery to their house of mourning, Germaine found her brother Louis lying very ill in bed. When the poor invalid saw his dear sister, he opened his arms and said with tears, "Here you are, dear Germaine!" and she, falling into his arms, exclaimed: "Now we have no mother! but from this day I will look after you . . ." and she wept bitterly. . . .

M. Castang's eldest daughter, Lucy, in religion Sister Mary of St Germain, was not at home to take her mother's place; therefore it fell to Germaine to be both mother and grown-up sister, and she did so with all the wisdom and affection of her generous heart. She was only fourteen years and seven months, but "*God had given* her as her heritage gentleness, self-forgetfulness, and devotion."‡

Mme. Castang's funeral had taken place on the last day of the year. January 1, 1893, was a sad New Year's Day, and the gift which the Child Jesus offered to his future Poor Clare was the cross, the bare cross. In order that she might the better accept it, Germaine renewed her fervour and love for the good God who alone could give her strength. At an early hour she was prostrate before the taber-

* Bossuet.

† Job.

‡ Proverbs.

A Kiss of Joy and a Kiss of Sorrow

nacle, praying to the God of the Eucharist and pleading for help and courage.

It was Sunday, and Germaine remained to hear Mass. M. Castang, however, absorbed in his grief, had lost all count of the days, and when he saw that his daughter had been out so early, he said in surprise :

“ You have been to Mass ? ”

“ Yes, father, it is Sunday. ”

“ Ah ! ” answered M. Castang, “ why did you not tell me ? I would have gone with you. I did not think it was Sunday . . . and now I have missed Mass and I cannot make up for my forgetfulness because there is no second Mass. . . . ”

The poor man was very unhappy, and Germaine was equally distressed. As she was unfamiliar with the church, she had not known that only one Mass was celebrated both on Sundays and weekdays. However, she did her best to comfort her father and reassured him by saying that his sorrow for not having heard Mass excused him in the sight of God for his involuntary forgetfulness.

Meanwhile, Louis was rapidly failing ; his mother's death had exhausted his little remaining strength. In vain Germaine redoubled her care and multiplied her delicate attentions. The brother's illness resisted all the sister's tenderness.

The young consumptive was perfectly resigned and in admirable dispositions ; in fact, like his patron, St Aloysius, the angelic young man seemed to “ smile at death ” ; he was homesick for Heaven, and was only waiting for his holy mother to come to fetch her favourite son.

Eight days after Mme. Castang's death, Germaine and her father were sitting together in a room near the invalid's, when they heard a loud cry. They

A Lily of the Cloister

both ran to Louis. What a sight ! . . . A stream of blood was flowing from his mouth . . . it was the final crisis, the last struggle. . . . Louis, who was twenty-three years of age, gave up his soul to God in the arms of his father and sister, who were suggesting pious invocations to him. "He died the death of a saint," says Sister Mary of St Germain, to whom all the details of her brother's last moments were sent.

For the second time within eight days the angel of death had snatched a victim from this house of mourning. And what victims !—a mother in all the flower of her age ; a son in his spotless, radiant youth ! . . .

Even in these sad circumstances Germaine's courage and self-possession did not fail her. Her devotion to all her duties may indeed be described as heroic. Repressing her own grief, she thought only of others. Yet God alone knows how terrible were the wounds inflicted on her soul and heart.

Mme. Castang and six children, exactly half the family, had disappeared. M. Castang and six other children were left in this valley of tears. "Grant, O Lord, that all those who loved each other so much in this world may one day be reunited in Heaven. . . ."

CHAPTER VIII

GOD ALONE

UNDER M. Castang's roof sacrifice and painful separations were the order of the day. The poor father had to resign himself to yet another trial; his two little daughters, Lubine and Lucia, were to leave him. It was, however, for their good; the kind nuns of Nazareth, whose hearts were deeply touched by the heavy trials that had befallen Germaine's family, had offered to take the two motherless little girls under their care. After a last kiss to their beloved father, a last visit to the graves of their mother and brother, Germaine, who was now nearly fifteen, set out for Nazareth with her two little sisters—Lucia, aged seven, who was also her little goddaughter, and Lubine, some eighteen months older.

It was a great consolation for Germaine to have her two dear little sisters with her. They were such good children, so obedient, so grateful, that they soon won the affection of all the nuns and pupils, who vied with one another in loving and spoiling them. But this consolation was not to last long. Already our blessed Lord had looked upon Germaine with the eyes of his divine jealousy; he wished to see her separated from those she loved, deprived of all consolation, and utterly abandoned to the good pleasure of his divine will. She had had to resign herself to living far from her father; her mother and eldest brother she could only rejoin in

A Lily of the Cloister

Heaven; her eldest sister, the nun of St Joseph's, she was to see no more in this world; two other brothers were parted from her; and now her two darling little sisters, whom she had so often carried in her arms, whose first steps she had guided, and to whom she had indeed been a little mother—her little sisters whose presence and whose smiles were half her life and her sole glimpse of human joy, suddenly were taken from her. Germaine remained alone at the foot of her crucifix. Little by little God was teaching her by all these separations to say, "God alone," that cry of seraphic love—"God alone."

It was during the summer of 1893 that Lubine and Lucia Castang left Nazareth House to join their eldest sister, Sister Mary of St Germain. A few words will explain the change from Bordeaux to the Ardèche. The dear Sisters of St Joseph, who were still at Nojals, remembered that in former days Lubine and Lucia's mother had begged them to adopt her two little girls if she did not live to bring them up herself. They wished to be faithful to their promise, and therefore wrote for permission to the Rev. Mother-General. "In the month of August, 1893" (so writes Sister Mary of St Germain), "in answer to the request of our good Sisters of Nojals, who were so devoted to my family, and also, perhaps, out of consideration for me, Very Rev. Mother was so very kind as to receive Lubine and Lucia amongst the orphans under the care of the nuns."

Whilst Sister Mary of St Germain was rejoicing in the presence of her two little sisters, Germaine was offering to God the sacrifice of the separation; it was a sacrifice which cost her very dear. Everything seemed to combine to fill her soul with sorrow

God Alone

and wound her heart; indeed, it may be said that she was passing through an agony at this time of her life—an agony which was prolonged until she entered the Monastery of *Ave Maria*. Had not the dart of divine love pierced her heart, causing her intense suffering until she could follow her vocation!

Germaine had always longed for the religious life, but since her first Communion her ardent desires had become a real torture; she was pining for the shadow and silence of the cloister, the austere life of the daughters of St Clare. It was only a day or two after her first Communion that she asked the Rev. Father Firmin, guardian of the Friary at Bordeaux, to apply on her behalf for admission in the novitiate of the Poor Clares at Talence. However, her extreme youth and her lame leg caused this request to be refused. Germaine was inconsolable. Believing that the Poor Clares was forever closed to her, she tried at least to consecrate herself to God in the institute which had so charitably received her three sisters. But here her efforts met with no greater success. Mary of St Germain, whom she had naturally chosen as her advocate, found herself placed in a very delicate and difficult position. Not daring to insist with her superiors, and more distressed than Germaine herself at the disappointments which she was bound to give her in her letters, she shrank from writing to her dear little sister. This silence was a fresh source of suffering for Germaine. In one of her few letters which escaped destruction we can see how sad she felt, how much she suffered interiorly. Let us quote a few passages:

A Lily of the Cloister

“BORDEAUX,
“June 3, 1894.

“DEARLY LOVED SISTER,

“Nearly half the year has gone by and I have no news of you all. You must either be ill or busy with a great deal of work—or can it be that you are losing your love for me? for since Easter, when I last wrote to you, you might have found time to answer me. If only you knew, dear sister, how sad it is to be so far away from all one’s relations! And yet you ought to understand it, for you have been separated, as I am now, from all those whom you loved. Now that you have taken my two little sisters from me, it seems as though I was quite cast on one side; it seems as if no one still loves me but my father. At Easter-time he came to see me, and stayed two days in Bordeaux. He was quite surprised that you had not written to me.”

Then, after speaking of some family affairs, she gives in her own charming way a whole-hearted *fiat* of resignation to the formal refusal which has been sent to her.

“But perhaps you will be surprised that I say nothing of coming to join you. It is because in your last letter you asked me to be more submissive to the will of God. Well, my dear sister, I am quite resolved to do God’s holy will. I have thrown myself into his arms, and now, whatever happens, I will say with Jesus, ‘*Fiat.*’ Do you ask me, dear sister, where I find this courage? Would you like me to tell you? It is in the divine food which nourishes me every Sunday. Oh, dearest sister, how can I describe the joy I feel when I receive my Jesus? It is he who comforts me in all my little sorrows; it is he who makes me truly happy.

“All my mistresses are more and more devoted

God Alone

to me. Help me to prove to them my gratitude by praying to him who alone possesses inexhaustible treasures, to return them a hundredfold for all the kindness which they showered upon me.

“Kiss my little sisters very lovingly for me. Their mistresses and little companions here send them affectionate greetings. Give my most sincere respects to Sister St H. and good Sister A.

“My love to you, my dearest sister, and my fondest kisses.

“Your sister who loves you,

“GERMAINE CASTANG

“(Child of Mary).”

Let us hasten to add that Sister Mary of St Germain was far from being indifferent to her dear little sister. On the contrary, she shared in all her sufferings, and was united with her in her martyrdom. We will give a fragment of a letter written by her to our Very Rev. Mother Abbess :

“Since her first Communion Germaine’s letters spoke only of her longing for the cloister ; but God, although he seemed to be calling her unmistakably to the religious life, yet kept the door of the Monastery for a long time closed against her. Meanwhile she was languishing in the solitude of Nazareth, for, although so universally loved and esteemed, she felt that there she was not in her right surroundings. This trial was far from being the least of her life. Her letters broke my heart. Being unable to enter the Monastery of Poor Clares after her first Communion, the dear child would have liked to enter the novitiate of the Sisters of St Joseph. On account of her infirmity, however, our good superiors felt it their duty to refuse to admit her, and the poor child imagined that I had not done all

A Lily of the Cloister

I could to forward her wishes. God knows what it cost me not to be able to give her any hope—how many bitter tears I shed! Throughout this long and painful trial Germaine's patience was wonderful. She suffered in silence and for the love of God, until the day when you yourself, Very Rev. Mother Abbess, put an end to the delays of Heaven by opening to her the doors of the holy and fervent Monastery of *Ave Maria*, where, all too soon, the short years of her earthly pilgrimage were to come to an end."

Germaine was to stay at Nazareth House until 1896. Whilst outwardly leading quite an ordinary life, she in reality was imitating the humble, silent, obedient, and hidden life of our blessed Lady in the Temple; she was scrupulous in the employment of her time, though never thereby losing the presence of God. Her spirit of faith, which was ever growing stronger, enabled her to accept as from his hand her daily difficulties and little trials. The recollection with which she said every day the little Office of our Lady edified her companions very much. It was easy for them to read on her face what joy she felt in speaking to God. One day a companion who had noticed that she was smiling whilst doing her work asked her the reason. She sighed, and said quite simply: "I fancied that I was already in my Poor Clare cell." In short, Germaine was a model to her companions; they all declared with one voice that she had no faults. To their verdict may be added the testimony given by the nuns of St Clare, who can all affirm that they never saw their gentle little Sister commit a single voluntary imperfection—indeed, her life in the Monastery of *Ave Maria* was more angelic than human.

God Alone

There is little more of striking interest to record during the peaceful days which preceded her entrance to the *Ave Maria*. However, her correspondence reveals the rôle of peacemaker which she played in her family in an affair of much delicacy.

During the year 1895 there was a misunderstanding between M. Castang and one of his sons. Germaine heard that her brother, who was not living at home, was reluctant to visit his father at Nojals. In the hope of serving as a connecting-link between them, Germaine left Nazareth House. Like an angel of peace she went to see her brother, near La Réole, and her sweet words persuaded him to return to his father. She herself went first to the Dordogne to prepare the way. All went well, and on September 22, 1895, Germaine wrote to Sister Mary of St. Germain of this happy victory :

“I have at last persuaded our brother to pay a visit to dear papa . . . he was afraid . . . but does not our Lord receive the sinner as well as the just? . . . does not my father receive me? and if so, then, why not this other child of his? In this way I prepared papa for this unexpected visit. The moment came for my brother's arrival; one shake of the hand was enough to make peace, and my brother stayed with us a week.”

Such were Germaine's great victories. To make peace, to re-establish harmony, to give happiness as far as she was able by being the messenger of reconciliation and joy. Yes, those were her triumphs, and to gain them what did sufferings, or fatigue, or difficulties matter? God would reward her for all that : “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.”

Almighty God continued, however, to try his little servant. The veil which hid the future from

A Lily of the Cloister

her was not yet to be raised; on the contrary, it was thicker and darker than ever. Poor child! the journey to Nojals which procured such happiness for others only brought her fresh disappointment, and she spent three days in tears. Her last hope of being a religious was taken from her, and to this were added many intimate trials, which we cannot describe. Enough to say that they touched Germaine to the depths of her soul. "I have suffered terribly," she writes to Sister Mary of St Germain, "but do not speak of this to anyone."

In another letter she writes: "My good mistresses received me with open arms. I threw myself into them as I would have done into the arms of our dear mother. But if until now I had lived in hope, I have now lost it completely. I had intended, though I kept this a secret from anyone, to write myself to your Reverend Mother, but my dear mistresses told me there was no possibility of my being received anywhere until I was completely cured. I have therefore given up all hope, and for two or three days, whenever my dear father was absent, my tears have not ceased to flow. . . . It is hard to say the *fiat* of resignation. Pray for me, dear sister. I have prayed for you, and for you have offered up many little mortifications which I have done during the day."

One can see that Germaine's heart was full of sorrow, her soul stricken with grief. Everywhere she was rejected, everywhere refused. Poor Germaine! However, at the hour of crisis our Lady did not fail her; she it was who was to open for her the doors of the *Ave Maria*. But this great joy, in reality so near, was still hidden from Germaine. Her trouble, her tears, her secret agony, the apparent abandonment by God, were the strong

God Alone

wind which was at last to bring her into harbour. Only a few more months, and she was to find in the Monastery of the *Ave Maria* the religious family which she had sought for years. Experience was once more to prove that "the hours of desolation are the hours of God," and, again, "what God keeps is well kept."

CHAPTER IX

THE MONASTERY OF THE "AVE MARIA"—GERMAINE OBTAINS HER FATHERS CONSENT—HER LAST INTERVIEW WITH HIM—LETTERS TO HER SISTERS

BUT what is this new Alvernia, on the summit of which Germaine was going, like the seraphic St Francis of Assisi, to cast herself into the furnace of divine love? What is this new *Ave Maria*, where at the close of the nineteenth century the seraphic life of the first Poor Clares of Bordeaux, extinguished in 1521, was to rise again on the banks of the River Garonne?

The Monastery of *Ave Maria* at Bordeaux-Talence is of very recent date. It was founded in 1891 by the Very Rev. Mother Mary Clare Isabella of St Francis, Abbess, and Rev. Mother Marie-Séraphine of the Heart of Jesus, Vicar and Novice-Mistress.

It is a Monastery of Poor Clares, by which name the daughters of St Clare have been known ever since the thirteenth century, when it was given to them by their foundress herself.

Clare was born at Assisi in 1194, of the noble house of Scefì. She was destined by the divine Providence to lay the foundations for women of that form of religious perfection which St Francis had already instituted for the Friars Minor. Rich in all gifts of nature and of grace, the young girl no sooner heard the message of the seraphic Patriarch than she understood the vanity of the world, and on March 19, 1212, she received from his hand the habit

The Monastery of the "Ave Maria"

of penance, in the little chapel of Portiuncula, and there consecrated herself to the religious life.

Shortly after, St Francis led his spiritual daughter to the little Monastery of St. Damien, which he had restored with his own hands, that it might be the cradle of the new Order.

Many chosen souls hastened to join Clare, and soon the Community of the Poor Ladies became a home of sanctity, a paradise of prayer and peace, a busy hive sending forth fresh swarms far and near. Its rule, like that of St Francis, was based on the strictest poverty.

Wonderful miracles bore witness to the sanctity of Clare; her prayer seemed to be all-powerful. The Crib, the Passion, and the Eucharist were unfailingly the objects of her most tender devotion. Pope Innocent IV held the saint in the greatest veneration and visited her several times. One day he commanded her to bless the Community table. She submitted humbly, and immediately—a miracle of obedience—the sign of the cross appeared imprinted on every loaf.

The holy foundress governed her Order for forty-two years; love and penance were consuming her, and her one longing was to be united to her heavenly Spouse. At last God called her to himself, on August 11, 1253, and the Queen of Heaven with a multitude of virgins came to meet her.

The Pope presided in person over her funeral ceremonies; two years after her death she was canonized. To-day her holy body is exposed to the veneration of the faithful in the church of the Poor Clares at Assisi.

Even in the lifetime of Saint Clare her foundations had multiplied. In the fifteenth century a new impulse was given to them by St Colette.

A Lily of the Cloister

To-day, after seven centuries, the Order is as flourishing as ever; there are about ten thousand Poor Clares, who are to be found all over the world.

The Poor Clares Colettines chant the divine Office every day; in addition, they say the Office of the Dead and make two hours' meditation. They walk barefoot; winter and summer, they rise from midnight to two o'clock to sing the praises of God, and devote themselves to holy contemplation. They observe perpetual fast and abstinence, practising the austerities in use in the most severe Orders. Their enclosure is absolute; they live only on alms, begging their bread from day to day. Willing victims of the Heart of Jesus, their work is to immolate themselves in secret for the Church, their country, the whole human race, poor sinners; to pray for the sick, to offer up their suffrages for the dead; to make reparation for the blasphemies, the sacrileges, and the crimes which blacken the world. They beg unceasingly good vocations for the priesthood and the cloister. Special blessings have been promised by God himself to all those who help the children of St. Francis.

Situated outside the town walls, the Monastery of the Poor Clares, often called by the charming name of the "*Ave Maria* outside the walls," enjoyed practically all the advantages of the country. The splendid air, the quiet and solitude surrounding it, made it a favourite place for country walks, especially on Sundays; and the girls from the boarding-schools made little excursions to it. Often the pupils of Nazareth House took their walks in the neighbourhood of the Monastery, and for Germaine it was no small joy to pass to and fro under the barred and half-closed windows of a

The Monastery of the "Ave Maria"

building hallowed by the Poor Clares. From time to time she would stop, and, fixing her gaze on the sacred walls of the enclosure, she would exclaim to her companions: "Oh! if only I had my little cell in there, how happy I should be!"

Far from being discouraged by difficulties and refusals, the would-be postulant was still beseeching Heaven to grant her desires, and one day, no longer able to contain herself, she came in person, in all the fervour of a generous *Ecce venio*, to beg admittance to the cloister. It was Easter Monday, a day of joy, of glad "Alleluia," one of those spring days so beautiful in our country. Germaine was only eighteen, when once more she knocked very timidly at the parlour grating and asked for the grace of entering the enclosure.

Her candour, humility, and delightful simplicity made a deep impression on us. To hear her through our gratings and curtains was enough to charm and touch us; but when we saw her we were altogether vanquished; her cause was won. In truth, it was the finger of God that was pointing out to us this young girl as a privileged soul whom he wished to unite with himself in the seraphic Order. How could we resist God himself? Putting on one side all the arguments which had induced us to refuse Germaine two and a half years before, we were all inspired to receive her, and in admitting this dear postulant we had the happy conviction that we were doing the will of God.

Yet no one had pleaded the gentle child's cause. It was her own wonderful humility and sweet simplicity which had spoken for her; it was her virtue which, so to say, broke through the ramparts of our cloister, and took by storm the little cell, so long dreamed of, so ardently desired.

A Lily of the Cloister

Oh my God ! how true it is that thou always doest the will of those who love thee !

Before leaving the parlour, Germaine made an act of extreme simplicity. " Reverend Mother," she said, " I have spoken to you of my leg, but I must show you how much I limp." Then, crushing self-love underfoot, she limped most painfully round the room. This action and the humble simplicity of the poor child spoke more in her favour than any great act could have done. Her gratitude equalled her humility. With tact and great delicacy of feeling, she assured us of her thankfulness for the hope we gave her of being admitted amongst us. Then she went away and it seemed as though her spirit had passed through the grille. In truth she already belonged to the God of our tabernacle and to her new family. Nevertheless, there was a last obstacle to remove. Germaine was not yet eighteen years of age ; therefore we could not admit her without her father's full consent. It was her task to obtain this new sacrifice from him. Indeed, she lost no time in doing so ; but M. Castang was so upset when he received his daughter's letter that he wished to consider the matter and to consult his eldest daughter before giving his final decision. When Germaine received this answer, she immediately wrote to Mary of St. Germain to beg of her to plead her cause. The following letter will show the anxiety of the aspirant :

" BORDEAUX,
" April 12, 1896.

" VERY DEAR AND BELOVED SISTER,

" Are you expecting a letter from me ? Perhaps not. Has the news already been told to you ? Perhaps it has, but nobody can tell you better than myself what has happened. On Easter Monday

Letters to her Sisters

my companions had gone home for their Easter holidays. Sister Naomi, who always does her best to please me, allowed me to go for a walk with one of the monitresses. As we were coming back we called upon the Poor Clares to see one of the extern Sisters whom we knew. I was in the hall when these words escaped from my heart more than from my lips : ‘ How happy these nuns must be ! Shall I never be of their number ? Oh ! if I could only be a nun ! ’ The extern Sister with whom we were speaking asked me if I wished to speak to Mother Abbess and tell her how I was situated. Of course, I had no hope at all of being accepted ; the obstacles seemed to me insurmountable, but God had guided me and had prepared the way.

“ The curtains of the grille were lifted, and I saw four of the nuns. Goodness and kindness were depicted upon their features ; at any other time I should have blushed to find myself amongst strangers, but just then I was quite at home with my new family. I felt as though I had spent all my life with them. I was questioned over and over again. Reverend Mother Vicaress pleaded my cause before the Reverend Mother Abbess, and they said to me when I left : ‘ Pray and hope. ’

“ At last the realization of all my dreams and hopes was accomplished. It was too much for me ; joy intoxicated me ; but there is still something more for me to tell you. Last Wednesday morning Mother St Peter received a letter telling her that I am accepted, and that I am to go and see the Reverend Mother Abbess next Sunday.

“ Once more we see how God calls souls to him, and how he overthrows all difficulties when he desires a soul to be all his. Mother St Peter told

A Lily of the Cloister

me to write to my father. I did so immediately, but in waiting for his answer I went to the Monastery of the Poor Clares last Sunday, where again the curtains were lifted, but this time the whole Community was assembled. One of the Mothers is only eighteen years old; she entered when she was only fifteen, and it is she who will be my angel guardian. The nuns welcomed me with joy, and decided that I should enter definitely on the feast of our Lady of Good Counsel. All now needed was my father's permission. He has just written to me and told me that he would act according to your suggestion. Very dear sister, if you love me and have understood the sufferings of my heart in the past, see in all these events the wonderful providence of God. My first desire was for the contemplative life—the life of the Poor Clares. When I saw their Monastery I was so impressed that words failed me. I was only fifteen years of age then, and my request for admission was refused. I therefore decided to go no matter where. Last year during the retreat I asked to enter anywhere, but again I was refused. God was waiting for me, and now I know for certain that I am to be a Poor Clare. All my mistresses congratulate me, and my confessor glorifies God's designs upon me.

“Now, dear sister, do not be selfish or sad, but rejoice with me; try to understand. You do not wish me to return to my family—do you wish me to remain here? Indeed, that is not my desire. You know how I have always longed to be a Poor Clare; therefore I am not becoming a nun without reflection. If you only knew how happy the Mothers of the Monastery are! Then, again, there is a novitiate for me to try this life. Do obtain permission for me from my father. I shall leave all to

Letters to her Sisters

find all. I know the miseries of this life. As we are going to God, it is better to give ourselves entirely to him. Do not worry about my health. I shall be a postulant for six months; I shall not have to fast before I am twenty-one. It is true I shall have to walk barefooted, but what does that matter? I am just as cold with my woollen stockings on as I am without them. My chilblains only broke when I made those long walks at the time of mother's death. I have not had them since; besides, if it is God's will that I should be a nun, I shall succeed. I shall not be entirely separated from you, for I shall write home several times a year.

"Did I put any obstacles in your way when you wished to follow your vocation? No. Well, don't put any in mine. Of course, it costs me much to leave all whom I love, but my sacrifice will only be all the more agreeable to God.

"Tell my father that I shall never be happy in the world, for true happiness is not to be found in this world, but one may have it by belonging entirely to Jesus. How many a time you have said, 'It is not we who choose him, but God who chooses us.' He has chosen me—therefore rejoice.

"Just two words about our brother Gilbert, who has returned from Madagascar. He is here at Bordeaux, very ill since last Friday. He has suffered so much from hunger, thirst, and other privations, and he still has seven months of military service to fulfil. To-day he has gone to Rochefort. In my next letter I will tell you more about him.

"Fondest kisses to yourself and to my little sisters, thanking them for their letters.

"Your ever loving sister,

"GERMAINE CASTANG."

A Lily of the Cloister

Sister Mary of St. Germain was too good a religious to hinder her sister's vocation. We have not read the letter she wrote to her father, but we feel assured that she was a great help to her sister on this occasion, and through her intercession M. Castang generously gave his written consent. This was Germaine's real passport. We have kept this document telling of a father's generous sacrifice. Such acts are registered in the Book of Life to be eternally rewarded. Yes, the angels keep account of the sacrifices we make for God. Oh, how many fathers and mothers will receive a great reward for having sacrificed their children to God!

M. Castang's consent was given under two conditions: First, that Germaine would have her photo taken (happy thought which enriches us with our little saint's portrait!). Second, that Germaine should spend a few days with him at Nojals before she entered. Her father welcomed her with visible emotion. His child was not an ordinary child; she already belonged to God, and so pure was her angelic soul that he would have severely reproached himself if he delayed even for a short time the gift of this soul to God. God had always been the supreme Ruler of his family, and it would always be so, even at the cost of sacrifice and trouble.

Germaine therefore went home for a few days. On the first evening she and her father sat together until midnight speaking of her vocation, of the Monastery of the *Ave Maria*, and the happiness of those who leave all to find all. The clock struck midnight in the midst of their conversation.

"It is time for us to go to bed," said M. Castang, "but I must say my Rosary. I have not missed

Letters to her Sisters

saying it once since your dear mother's death. Would you like to say it with me?"

"He said the Rosary and so many other prayers," said Germaine, "that I nearly fell asleep. It was happiness to find so much piety at home; to possess a father who lived for God alone, and who did not fear to uphold religion in public. Once I heard him say to one of my brothers: 'Always remember that we can do nothing without God.'"

M. Castang lived alone at Bouchou. After having had so many children around him, the poor father felt their absence very keenly; nevertheless, peace and joy were in his heart. "Give to God, and you will find true happiness," says Eliphaz to Job.* Yes, in spite of his solitude he had the great satisfaction of having done his duty.

When Germaine bade her father good-bye, this generous soul sacrificed his daughter with admirable resignation, but how much he must have suffered as he held her for the last time in his arms—she, his consolation in his sorrow, and the confidante of his anxieties. His heart bled, but God had claimed his child, and he had given her without a murmur. In bidding farewell to all her family, Germaine suffered intensely. As she departed from Nojals everything seemed to cry out: "Good-bye, Germaine! Good-bye! To-morrow you will have left us for ever; to-morrow we shall see you no more." She looked for the last time upon the little church where she had so often prayed, and she threw a last kiss to the chapel of Madame St Anne. It was the month of May; the flowers seemed to salute her as she passed by, and the rivulets whispered, "Good-bye, good-bye." She heard all the voices, she answered them; but

* Job xxii 21.

A Lily of the Cloister

stronger and sweeter than any earthly voice was the voice of her Beloved—"Hasten! my friend, my dove, my all beautiful one, and come"—and Germaine quickened her steps towards her sacred Spouse, whispering in a loving strain: "*Ecce venio! Me voici! . . .*"

When Germaine left Nojals she wrote a long letter to her sister, Mary of St. Germain: "I am sending you my photo," she says; "when you look at it you may say, 'Yes, this is my little sister such as she was, wearing her uniform dress and her ribbon of a Child of Mary, which is a pretty blue, although it appears white.'"

She then consoles her sister: "Tell me all that pains you; your anxieties are mine. You know my heart has always been an open book for you to read in; now let me read in yours. Tell me all—do! I shall understand you, for are you not my beloved sister?"

"On June 12, the feast of the Sacred Heart, pray for me especially, for it is the day chosen for my entrance into the Order of the Poor Clares. As for me, I place myself entirely in the divine Heart of Jesus.

"All my desires are accomplished. God has sent my brother back to me" (she is speaking of Gilbert, just returned from Madagascar); "father consents to let me follow my vocation; and my uncle has given me my trousseau—all blessings for which I thank God. I went to Dordogne for a few days, but I am sorry I could not go and pray at mother's grave.

"Before closing my letter I must say a few words to my little sisters. Dear little ones, I am sorry to have to leave you without knowing when I shall

Letters to her Sisters

have the happiness of seeing you again. If I do not see you again in this world, I certainly will do so in Heaven; there all sacrifices will end. Good-bye until then. My fondest kisses to you all. Good-bye, dear Lucy.

“GERMAINE CASTANG.

“P.S.—The nuns of St Joseph at Nojals have my rosary and my medals; they will give them to you.”

She also writes to Lucia, her godchild, and to her other sister, Lubine :

“DEAR LITTLE GODCHILD,

“You will shed many a tear when you hear that your godmother has gone away for ever, but she has given herself to God, so do not cry. One day we shall meet in Heaven, never to be separated again. In waiting for this happiness, grow up to be worthy of all the graces God has bestowed upon you.

“GERMAINE.”

“MY DEAR LITTLE SISTER LUBINE,

“You are the last to whom I am writing. I shall never forget you; I shall pray that you may always give good example to your little sister, and that you may be the joy of your mistresses. I have nothing to give you, but our sister, Mary of St Germain, shall give you my photo. Good-bye, my little Lubine; although far from you in person, yet I am near you in spirit.

“GERMAINE CASTANG.”

Such were the “good-byes” Germaine said to her sisters. Her last interview with her brother

A Lily of the Cloister

was not so peaceful. He had just returned from Madagascar, and he treated her rather harshly, but to all his reproaches she quietly replied: "I did not stop you from going to Madagascar, which you so wished; therefore do not hinder me from following my vocation. You have adopted a soldier's career; I am free to choose my own career." In spite of these words, Gilbert still insisted: "I beg of you, Germaine, do not shut yourself up in a cloister." "The cloister is my vocation, for I am called by God; therefore I must go." The brother and the sister separated, heart-broken. . . . This victory completed Germaine's sacrifice, and she must have heard the voice of her God whispering to her heart: "Thou hast left father, mother, sister, and brother, all that thou hast, for my Name's sake; thou shalt receive a hundredfold in this life, and shalt possess eternal life."*

* Matt. xix.

CHAPTER X

GERMAINE ENTERS THE MONASTERY OF THE "AVE MARIA"—HER CLOTHING—THE YOUNG NOVICE'S VIRTUES—THE RENDEZVOUS IN HEAVEN

IT was on the fourth anniversary day of her first Communion, June 12, 1896, feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, that Germaine bid good-bye to the Rev. Mother-Superior of Nazareth House, and thanked her for the great kindness shown to her. She then kissed her companions, and, accompanied by the Rev. Mother-Assistant, her mistress, Sister N., and her confidante (Clare), she arrived at the Monastery of the *Ave Maria*. The Sacred Heart of Jesus had guided her, and had inundated her soul with extraordinary joy. Although greatly affected by the separation from all she loved at Nazareth House, Germaine smilingly read the inscription written over the door of the Monastery: "Here one learns to die." This was now the lesson to learn; some of the friends who had accompanied her trembled at the thought of the austerity of such a lesson, but the happy aspirant comforted them and begged of them not to cry.

Whilst she was bidding her last farewell to her friends, the nuns who had accompanied her conversed with us at the grille. "We are giving you a beautiful soul," they said; "we are convinced she has never lost her baptismal innocence"; and their tears were many at being separated from her; they were losing the angel of their house.

A Lily of the Cloister

The chapter bell was calling all the nuns to meet in the cloister; the moment was near for Germaine to enter the silent desert of the *Ave Maria*: *Attollite portas vestras*. . . . Open, ye doors, open to the "Angel of Nazareth." The virgins of the Monastery were waiting to welcome her to their solitude. When the doors opened, Germaine caught sight of the big wooden cross carried by one of the nuns, which seemed to be approaching her. It was the last signal to the completion of her sacrifice. She tore herself from her mistresses and fell prostrate on the threshold of the enclosure at the feet of our Rev. Mother Abbess, who blessed her and helped her to arise. She was then introduced to the ranks of the enclosed nuns. For one moment the religious of Mary Joseph had a glimpse of the daughters of St Clare, barefooted and deeply veiled; then the doors were closed, and whilst Germaine's friends were sobbing in the extern hall, a joyful *Magnificat* resounded in the cloister, and in procession we led our new little Sister to the choir at the foot of our humble tabernacle, where, like the sanctuary lamp, she was going to be so soon consumed by her ardent love for Jesus.

A few hours later, Germaine received the habit worn by the postulants. It was thus that she was presented to her companions of the novitiate, and received from them their kiss of peace. Not only were the novices struck by her angelic appearance, but all the Community welcomed her with open arms. Mother Abbess and the Mistress of Novices tenderly received her, and her infirmity, far from being an obstacle to her vocation, inspired compassion and love for the dear sufferer.

Germaine threw herself into our arms as a child, and was received as by a mother. Respect and

The Monastery of the "Ave Maria"

admiration were very soon to intermingle with our love, for Germaine's life was a life of perfection, although she lived but the ordinary life of a postulant. We admired her silence, her exactitude, her attractive politeness. From the beginning she followed closely the way of renunciation. . . . At times she manifested surprise at some of the acts of virtue practised by the Sisters. Everything was so new in the monastic life, everything so different from worldly standards.

Humility seemed to be the first virtue which prompted her efforts. By it she hoped to become a saint, and to it she turned all her attention; not that she loved humiliation—no, she did not; she owned that to the Mistress of Novices.

"You fear humiliations, if I am not mistaken," said I to her one day. "No, you are not mistaken, Reverend Mother," she frankly replied; "I do." "Well, in less than a year's time, even before three months are over, you will come and ask me to be humiliated." Germaine could not believe such a thing, and she exclaimed: "I shall have to change a great deal if I do!" She did change, for a few days after this she came to me and asked me not to spare her pride, but to humiliate her whenever the occasion presented itself. A few weeks had fostered a deep friendship between our dear postulant and the humiliations she feared so much. "You must profit by such good example," I said to the novices one day when Germaine was absent. "The dear child is too perfect; we shall not have her long." Alas! this was but too true.

Germaine's humility was admirable; she judged herself unworthy to live with her companions who were so pious and so good. Her passion for humiliation obtained for her a favourite place in the

A Lily of the Cloister

Heart of Jesus, who always gives himself to those who are meek and humble of heart.

Her greatest pleasure was to be ignored; attentions worried her. One day she came to me in tears. "Mother," she said, "will you stop what is going on in the pantry? My companions oblige me to sit upon a little wooden box; whilst they sit on the ground. Why do they trouble about me so much?" "If you were more charitable," I replied, "you would praise God for the merit your companions obtain for their kindness to you. It is to spare your bad leg they offer you a more comfortable seat; be grateful to them for this attention, and offer God the humiliation you feel; very often it costs more to accept certain attentions than to be deprived of them." "If you wish me to, I accept," said Germaine; and from that moment she acquiesced in all the wishes of her companions.

Mortification and renunciation spoke lovingly to her heart; she had acquired full mortification over her senses; curiosity and vanity were dead to her. "Mother, I have promised God such and such sacrifice; help me to keep my promise," she would often say. This mortification induced her never to speak of her beloved school at Nazareth House, nor of her mistresses, nor of the companions she had left; and when a new postulant from Nazareth entered, she begged of her not to give her any news of the dear place. "You see," she said, "what you would tell might distract my thoughts from Jesus, and I want to be a perfect religious; it is better for me not to hear of the dear ones I have left for him."

She loved holy poverty; all that was old and worn was sought for by her humility and spirit of poverty. She never had two nibs nor more than two sheets

Her Clothing

of paper at a time, and if more were offered to her, she replied : " Oh, let me be poor, like my sisters."

Step by step she arrived at the summit of perfection ; she only stopped in her course to admire her Sisters' virtues, and to gather from their examples a greater ardour for virtue. Time was never lost for her when it was passed in seeking the means to obtain a higher perfection.

On a fine October day the novices and the Community nuns were busily working in the garden. One of the novices and Germaine had been left in the pantry to peel potatoes ; they had received permission to talk. The novice related the following anecdote :

A LITTLE SOUL.

One day there was a great commotion in Heaven. A little unknown soul walked straight in there without having shed a tear nor having done any wonders here below. Jesus smiled sweetly at her, and gave her a glorious place, much to the wonderment of the heavenly citizens, whose eyes immediately sought for the angel guardian who had accompanied this privileged little soul. The angel bowed before God and obtained permission to speak ; then words softer than the rustle of a butterfly's wing were heard in every corner of Heaven : " This soul has always accepted God's holy will ; sunshine or shadow, dust or rain, all was equally accepted as coming from God's will."

" *I shall be that little soul !*" exclaimed Germaine in an eager and solemn voice, her eyes alight with a celestial flame of love, and her soul was so rapt that I understood that, from that moment, she had made a contract with Jesus to do his holy will in all things and in all ways.

A Lily of the Cloister

She was the "little saint of the novitiate," and to her Jesus imparted his graces of trust and love. She had promised to accept sunshine and rain, dust or shadow, from him; he, as a divine Lover, gave more than was asked for, and the month of October brought many wonderful graces even approaching to the miraculous, as we read in the full Life of our little saint.

Her clothing was approaching; it was to be on November 21. She prepared her heart for this great day by making a fervent retreat. It would be impossible for us to lift the veil which hides the great graces Germaine received from God during those great days.

God led her into solitude and there spoke to her soul. She listened to him, and as she looked back upon her past life she exclaimed: "I see that I am good for nothing, a thousand times good for nothing; indeed, I am worse than that—I am only able to sin and to offend God. O Jesus, have pity on me!" In her humility she continues: "I suffer, O my God, when I consider on the one hand the numberless graces thou hast bestowed upon me, and on the other the number of my sins and the greatness of my ingratitude, always struggling against thy kindness. I have no heart; if I had, could I ever offend thee again? Nevertheless, I am eager to love thee, and during this retreat I beg of thee, O divine Master, to give me the shadow of a spark of love. Thou alone, O Jesus, canst quench my thirst for love."

After these accents of humility and love her generosity is unlimited: "O Jesus, my merits are very few. I have done nothing for thee up to now, but I am undertaking this work of my perfection with ardour, and at the end of this year, at the end

The Young Novice's Virtues

of my novitiate, I hope to offer thee more than I do now at the end of my postulancy." So as not to waste any time in the great work of her perfection, our dear aspirant offered herself as a victim to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. "I therefore offer myself as a victim to thee, O Sacred Heart of Jesus. Up to the present moment I have sacrificed all to thee—affections and thoughts, family and home. To-day shall I be less generous? . . . No! Here I am; cut, burn, wound, do with me what thou willest; so long as my love for thee grows more and more, it is all I ask."

November 21 fell on a Saturday. Every heart was full of joy, for we were to celebrate the feast of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple, and also of our little angel to her God and King. This day was indeed a great day. Germaine had wished it to be without solemnity. Therefore only our confessor and chaplain were there. A few friends accompanied the boarders and nuns of Nazareth, to be the witness of the aspirant's complete donation to God. In her white dress she was a picture of angelic purity. I had the privilege of dressing her, and I felt a thrill of love and purity penetrate my whole being as I clothed this holy child. With her crown of white roses underneath her long white veil, she resembled St Agnes, and as I kissed her forehead, the words of St. Ambrose rang in my heart: "To-day is the feast of a virgin; may we obtain her holy purity."

The Rev. Father Thadée, Vicar of the Franciscans of Bordeaux, held his audience enraptured by the eloquence of his sermon. The boarders from Nazareth sang their choicest canticles during Mass, and whilst our choir intoned the *Quam dilecta tabernacula tua*, we led our dear postulant to be

A Lily of the Cloister

clothed in the religious garments by our Very Rev. Mother Abbess, Clare Isabel of St Francis. Great was her joy when Germaine saw herself stripped of all worldly ornaments and invested with the thick woollen habit of St Clare. Her head was covered with the white veil of the novices; the Franciscan cord and the crown of thorns completed the religious garb which became her greatest treasure. Mother Abbess and the Mistress of novices led her to the foot of the altar, where the priest pronounced these sacred words: "Mademoiselle Jeanne-Germaine Castang, now that you are the fiancée of Jesus crucified, you will be called Sœur Marie-Céline de la Présentation."

Germaine had ceased to live for this world, but the chant *Ecce quam bonum* and the kiss of peace gave her a new life and a fond title to the happy enclosed family who already loved her dearly.

Monsieur le Comte de Saint-Marsault, her godfather, and Madame Lebaudy, her godmother, took the most loving interest in her, and to her last day she prayed for these noble benefactors of our Monastery.

Very Rev. Mother Abbess allowed Marie-Céline to say adieu to her friends, and before the black curtains of the grille were let down, Germaine gave her parting kiss to the Superior of the Monastery of Nazareth, to her mistresses, and to the boarders who had come to her clothing. This solemn adieu was the last; the rendezvous was in Heaven.

CHAPTER XI

*MARIE-CÉLINE BEGS OF GOD TO SEND HER PAINS
AND TRIALS—ILLNESS OF THE PIOUS NOVICE
—PROFESSION “IN EXTREMIS” — HEAVEN-
WARD—QUIET AND HUMBLE FUNERAL*

DURING the first days after her clothing day Marie-Céline acquired a greater holiness than before. The professed nuns, the novices, the postulants, were all in admiration at the great virtues of the young novice of eighteen years of age. Not a single day went by without being marked by her examples of charity, humility, renunciation, and exactitude. The dear child was advancing rapidly in the way of perfection. She longed for her celestial Spouse, and he was not long answering her call.

One cold December day, Marie-Céline felt the first touch of the painful illness which was to take her from us. She came to me, and with humility she said: “Mother, I am suffering a great deal.” “What has happened?” said I. “A few days ago you assured me you were quite well.” “And so I was,” replied our angelic child, “but since then I have asked God to send me pains and sufferings, and he has answered my prayer.” From that moment the terrible pains of rapid consumption constantly nailed her to the cross with her Jesus crucified. I questioned her. Her answers were simple and true. Alas! they confirmed me in my belief that soon, very soon, we would lose her. The *fiat* was hard for me to say. Mother Abbess, to whom I spoke, was greatly grieved at the prospect of

A Lily of the Cloister

losing our holy child. We sent for the doctor; he came, and after examining her well, he told us privately: "Alas! I can do nothing for her; in a few months she will die."

No doubt she had carried the germ of consumption for many years, although she appeared to be strong and healthy, and now that by her prayers she had besought God to send her sufferings, the relentless illness had developed rapidly, and was surely carrying off its victim.

The care we took of her wounded her great humility. "I ought to serve others instead of being the object of everyone's care and attention," she used to say; but we were all only too happy to surround her with every comfort, and when she feared to be spoiled we advised her to accept in a spirit of humility all that was done for her. Marie-Céline promised to do so, but it was easy to understand that she would have preferred a good humiliation to all these attentions, a work of penance to a cup of chocolate, the getting up at night to a peaceful sleep on the sofa.

Marie-Céline saw that she would never get better, and she feared to be sent away from the Monastery. This anxiety was killing her; she knew that by our rule we may not keep consumptive novices, but we made an exception for her. Who would have taken care of her if we had sent her home? Her father was occupied with his own business all day and was never at home; her mother was dead. Therefore our Very Rev. Mother Abbess consented to keep her, and to this decision all the Community agreed joyfully. Marie-Céline never forgot this great favour, and thanked us all most gratefully for not sending her away.

For several weeks our young novice was still able

Her Pains and Trials

to say the Divine Office with the Community; although she could no longer say it loud. She also followed the exercises of the novitiate, and eagerly hoped to glean humiliation there. But what could we reproach our angelic child with? This world was not pure enough for her pure soul. "Mother, why do you forgive my many infidelities and pass them over silently?" I smiled, and promised to punish her for her next fault. That quieted her; but though I watched her very closely, I was never able to find a fault in her. Her charity was admirable, and in spite of her humility she always went forward when charity and love were needed. She extended this charity to animals. If Moscow, our dog, had stolen different things, or if birds carried off grapes from the garden, she excused them some way or another, much to our amusement at times.

Alas! we very soon knew that nothing in the world could save Marie-Céline. We prayed to obtain her cure from God, but always without any result. Her family at Nojals joined in prayer with us; nothing was spared for this dear child. Our chaplain used to say: "It is not consumption that is taking her away from us, but her great love of God." Yes, she languished after God; her only life was in him. His Eminence the Cardinal,* our pastor, our head Superior, came several times to encourage our invalid; he always found her resigned and perfectly happy. When he came for the last time he authorized her to make her religious profession *in extremis* as soon as her confessor and our Very Rev. Mother Abbess thought fit. To describe Marie-Céline's happiness at such news

* His Eminence Cardinal Lecot, Archbishop of Bordeaux.

A Lily of the Cloister

would be an impossible task; her pale cheeks became of a soft pink, her eyes shone as diamonds, all in her spoke of her entire donation to Jesus. "Oh, Eminence," she cried, "thank you, thank you!" and from that moment she prepared herself with all the fervour of her ardent soul.

In March her illness laid hold of her with greater intensity; rapidly she was declining. She knew it and rejoiced. The great day of her religious profession was coming; she prepared herself by a few days of recollection.

On March 20 she had received great spiritual graces from Heaven; so great were they that her heart longed to escape from its prison to go to sojourn with her divine Spouse. A rapid decline was the signal for her religious profession *in extremis*. We were there round her, and in spite of our tears we made of this day a great and solemn feast-day. The novices plaited wreaths and garlands and rehearsed the sacred chants. The infirmary was beautifully decorated with plants and flowers. Marie-Céline watched all these preparations with delight.

At twelve o'clock everything was ready; beautiful white roses intermingled their scent with the ivy which decorated the walls of the infirmary; a dome of natural flowers coming from our Lady of Lourdes' altar overshadowed the dying child's bed, now in the centre of the room. Opposite the door was a pretty altar of spring flowers dedicated to *l'Enfant Jésus de Prague*, at whose feet we had placed a black veil, a crucifix, and a ring—all three for the happy bride. As time was so short, we had not had the means of getting a new crucifix nor ring, so I had lent her mine for the occasion; and now with what reverence I kiss them both, for they

Her Pains and Trials

had touched a saint and an angel of God; they are to me two jewels which are doubly dear.

All the nuns came to pay her a little visit at about half-past twelve; many of whom could not keep back their tears. "Please, dear Sisters," said Marie-Céline with a delightful smile, "do not cry; you disturb my happiness." Then, turning to me: "Mother, no one must cry; let them sing and pray that I may die quickly—the sooner the better. In Heaven I shall love God more." "You will not forget us?" said I to her. "Forget you . . . it will be impossible; I shall not forget anyone." A novice said to her: "You have never looked so happy as to-day." . . . Pointing to Heaven, she exclaimed: "Heaven! Heaven! what happiness! Make my religious vows, and then to go! . . ."

The solemn hour was near. Our chaplain being away from Bordeaux, Rev. Father Thadée was appointed by His Eminence Cardinal Lecot to preside over this touching ceremony of religious profession *in extremis*. At two o'clock he arrived with Rev. Father James. We went to the enclosure door to meet Jesus in the divine Host. It was like a procession of Corpus Christi. Arrived at the infirmary, Rev. Father Thadée placed the ciborium in the midst of the flowers and candles on the altar. Marie-Céline, on her bed, looked like one of those saints in our churches who are sleeping in their shrine. Yes, there she was, smilingly and peacefully pressing the crucifix to her heart, a crucifix decorated with flowers and ivy and bearing the formula of the blessed vows. The moment of communion was approaching. Marie-Céline placed the crucifix in my hands, and received the holy Viaticum. Whilst the Rev. Father brought back the ciborium to the church, the Sisters of the

A Lily of the Cloister

novitiate sang the hymn *Le voici l'Agneau si doux*. The dear invalid had herself chosen this hymn, because it reminded her of her first Communion.

Then Rev. Father Thadée administered the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. She followed each of the ceremonies with a heavenly smile. She was a queen who was being consecrated for eternity. Her companions sang another favourite hymn of hers: *J'attends le Ciel pour aimer à mon aise. . . . Ah! que ne puis-je y voler aussitôt* (I am longing for Heaven, where I shall love as I wish. . . . Ah! may I soon be there!).

The religious profession then took place. What a solemn moment! Marie-Céline placed her joined hands in the hands of her Abbess, who held the crucifix, and with a distinct, clear, and happy voice she pronounced the formula of the four vows which made her a professed nun of the seraphic Order. Her eyes said to Jesus: "All, all is consummated." Then the other ceremonies of the religious profession followed. She received the holy rule from the hands of Rev. Mother Abbess. Respectfully she kissed her hand as a sign of her deep gratitude and submission; then the Rev. Father gave her the crucifix of profession, then the ring, and last her black veil. When all was ended he said to Marie-Céline: "My dear child, now you belong entirely to God. Thank him for all the graces which he has bestowed upon you to-day. Now you are ready, but you must be fully resigned to the will of God. You wish for whatever God wishes, do you not?" "Yes," was the answer. "I understand," answered the Rev. Father, smiling, "why you say *yes* so willingly; it is because you think, as I do too, that our Lord's will is that you will go away soon?" Smilingly, she answered, "Yes,

Illness of the Pious Novice

Rev. Father," and thanked him for all he had done. He blessed all who were present, and then withdrew with his companion.

Although death seemed so near, it did not come. She lingered on for seventy days, and this epoch of her life was the most beautiful and the most meritorious. If her sufferings were great, still greater was her desire for Heaven, but greatest of all was her constant resolve to sanctify each moment of her dying life. Happy and noble child in whom Heaven was almost visible! Sweet perfumes, angelic songs, told of the presence of the angels, her sisters in Heaven.

As the fatal illness continued its work, the love of Jesus grew more and more in Marie-Céline. At midnight on Ascension Day (she hoped to leave this world before the end of this blessed day), "My God," she exclaimed, "I beg thee, take me! . . . Come and fetch me."

Since May 17 the poor child had suffered intensely; she was in agony several hours every day. Once as the prayers for the dying were said she asked us to sing the following hymn: *On m'entendra comme la tourterelle*, etc. (In this world of exile, my heart, like a dove, sighs and moans until it shall see Jesus, my Beloved, etc.).

Our dear victim was at the entrance of Heaven; only two days separated her from her God, whom she loved more and more. She often exclaimed: "Oh, Heaven . . . Heaven . . . what happiness! I am going to Heaven. . . ."

On the 29th she was worse. There was no doubt the precious moments of her life were slowly ebbing. Incessantly she kissed her crucifix. With her lips upon her Saviour's wounds, she found courage to suffer and to submit to God's holy will. The last

A Lily of the Cloister

night of her life was a very painful one; we whispered acts of confidence to her, and another loving kiss on the crucifix helped her to keep the peace of her soul.

Ten minutes before her death, Marie-Céline turned her eyes to the right side of her bed and smiled ecstatically: "Do you not see that Lady over there—oh, isn't she beautiful?" And three times she repeated the same words, her eyes remaining fixed upon this celestial vision. Suddenly she said: "Listen to the bells ringing!" and looking at the door, she added: "I see many little children dressed in white." Doubtless it was the procession of those who follow the Lamb, and are clothed in white, and sing psalms and carry palms in their hands. The angels and the virgins, accompanied by our blessed Lady, came to fetch the spouse of Christ.

Marie-Céline lifted herself up a little, and from her heart arose the sweet murmuring of prayer, such as the soft cooing of a dove; then, bowing her head on the right side, she died in the arms of Mother Abbess and her Novice Mistress. . . .

It was on a Sunday, May 30, about three o'clock in the morning. Underneath her window the lilies were in bloom, one of them opened just as Marie-Céline became a lily in Heaven. The morning was dawning, the sky seemed to be golden-purple, and above the clouds the soul of our angelic child went to her God. Yes, we all felt that she had found him whom her soul loved. She had gone to her Saviour and her Judge, and in Heaven she was shining as a brilliant star.

Monsieur l'Abbé Gabard, our chaplain, performed the burial service. "In my enthusiasm of faith," he said, "I repeated with the Church: *Benedictus*

Profession “in Extremis”

Dominus Deus Israel. Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, who has given such holy souls to the world; by their prayers the anger of God is arrested and the world is saved. Yes, I have committed the precious body of your dear child to a humble grave such as our Poor Clares love to have; but this grave, this humble spot, will be a glorious one some day. Pious hands will plant a little wooden cross over it, will sow sweet flowers around it, and from the lilies a voice will be heard: *Sub umbra illius quem desideraveram sedi* (I rest in peace under the shadow of the cross that I love so much).’’

From the day of her death, marvellous graces have inundated the Monastery and its friends. The “Lily of the Cloister” intercedes for those she knew on earth and for all those who ask her aid. And as she always did God’s will here below, now that she is with him in Heaven, he is pleased to grant her requests.

WE close the "Life of Sister Marie-Céline of the Presentation" with the following extract from the "Articles" presented in 1909 by the Reverend Father Francis Marie Paolini, Postulator-General of the Order of the Friars Minor, at the Ecclesiastical Tribunal of the Curia of Bordeaux, to declare the sanctity, virtues, and miracles, or seeming miracles of the deceased Marie-Céline, and obtain the introduction of her cause at the Holy See :

"A very evident proof of the true sanctity of the servant of God is to be found in the presence of so many who pray at her tomb, and who eagerly seek for relics of her. When her body was transferred to its present resting-place, eighteen months after her death, the thin wooden coffin was found perfectly intact, though it had been for so long in the damp ground."

After several years of examination the Ecclesiastical Tribunal of Bordeaux satisfactorily terminated the ordinary process of information concerning the cause of the Beatification of Sister Marie-Céline of the Presentation in the month of April, 1914.

All the friends of the Poor Clares and the clients of Sister Marie-Céline rejoice at the happy result of the process. They join in the prayers of the Community for the exaltation of the beloved child who is their powerful friend in Heaven.

FAVOURS ATTRIBUTED TO THE INTER- CESSION OF SŒUR MARIE-CÉLINE

MANY favours and blessings are attributed to the intercession of the servant of God, Sister Marie-Céline of the Presentation. A volume containing an account of these is now in the press, and will be issued shortly in French.*

In concluding this English sketch of the life of Marie-Céline, we give the following extracts from a few of the letters received.

[*Letter No. 1*]

J M.J. AND F.C.C.,
CONVENT OF POOR CLARES,
June 23, 1923.

VERY REVEREND MOTHER,

All for the glory of God and of his servant, the angelic little Sister Marie-Céline of the Presentation !

Sister Mary, one of our dear extern Sisters, had been suffering from a long and painful illness, and at last it was decided to send her to a Catholic hospital in London. There an operation was performed on her throat, and she also underwent a course of treatment for the ulcers from which she was suffering. These covered her whole body.

Sister Mary stayed in the hospital for a month and, to quote her own words, "during that time she always felt the sensible presence of Marie-Céline by her side, or at the foot of her bed." She never ceased invoking her, and she always wore her little

* *Prodiges et Faveurs*. Now ready, 7 francs. Mons, 125, Rue de Nimy, Belgium.

A Lily of the Cloister

relic (a particle of her clothing), even during the operation. . . . Not only was the operation most successful, but in other ways the effects of the dear little Saint's protection were very visible. From the general condition of the patient, and the nature of the ulcers, several doctors suspected the presence of a very virulent infection in the blood. However, when the blood was tested, to the great surprise and relief of all the doctors and nurses, the result was negative, no infection was found. All the ulcers healed satisfactorily and the patient's general condition improved.

A similar amelioration took place in our little Sister's sight, and we can attribute it only to the intercession of dear Sister Marie-Céline. About a week before Sister Mary left the hospital the oculist examined her eyes. He found them in a very weak condition, and ordered spectacles. On leaving the hospital she visited the oculist, who was quite surprised at the improvement which had taken place in her sight during the week. Again must we not humbly thank our saintly little Sister?

But Sister Marie-Céline was not content with helping Sister Mary. She made her power felt throughout the hospital, and won for herself all hearts. Sister Mary distributed pictures and relics of Marie-Céline, and soon nurses and patients alike were invoking her. On many occasions a relic was taken into the operating theatre.

In little and big ways Sister Marie-Céline of the Presentation manifested the interest she was taking in the hospital.

One day a patient, herself a nun, who shared the bedroom of Sister Mary, dropped her watch from the bed on to the floor. It stopped—broken! "Ask your little Sister Marie-Céline to mend it,"

Favours

exclaimed the poor nun, distressed by the failure in holy poverty. No sooner said than done, and no sooner was the request asked than granted. The watch began to go once more, and from that day went better than ever.

Another day the same nun was very desirous that a particular nurse should be present during the doctor's examination. It was this nurse's time "off duty," but, in spite of that fact, one fervent invocation of Sister Marie-Céline and she appeared at the door just before the doctor entered.

In more serious cases the beloved little Sister was equally powerful.

Sister V—— was sent to the hospital seriously ill, and it was believed that an operation would be necessary. The poor patient dreaded such an ordeal, and in her extremity she implored the intercession of Sister Marie-Céline, of whom she had heard in the hospital for the first time. Her prayers were answered in two ways. Sister Céline obtained for her the courage to undergo an examination under an anæsthetic . . . and at the same time saved her from a further trial, for no serious trouble was found, and no operation was necessary.

A little baby, four months old, was brought into the hospital suffering from pneumonia, and all hope of recovery was abandoned. But . . . the nurse in charge of the case was one of Sister Céline's protégées, and she immediately began a novena and solicited all the prayers she could. Contrary to all human hopes, the terrible disease took a turn for the better, and soon the suffering baby was declared out of danger. Gradually her condition improved and the little one is now quite well.

Are we not right in believing that dear Sister Marie-Céline of the Presentation has taken the

A Lily of the Cloister

Catholic hospital—where such wonderful work is being done not only for bodies but for souls—in a special way under her protection, and shall we not take it as another proof that Almighty God, who looks with such pleasure upon little ones, wishes to exalt his humble servant?

Accept, very Reverend Mother, the assurance of my most respectful and religious affection, and believe me to be

Your very humble servant in Jesus,
M.B. OF JESUS.
(*Abbess*).

[*Letter No. 2*]

An English community of Poor Clare Colettines write as follows :

An unknown correspondent in Brussels had sent us a number of pictures of Sister Céline, and Mother Abbess having given us one each, I started a novena in her honour. . . . Yesterday morning, to my great joy, I got exactly what I had prayed for. It is, humanly speaking, by no means a wonderful favour, but it is nevertheless one of the most decided answers to prayer that I have ever received. . . . For the past five years I have been receiving distressing letters from home concerning my brother, who though at one time the most devoted of sons, had completely given up visiting or even writing to my mother, which naturally causes her much sorrow and anxiety. We all wrote to him over and over again, but no one could extract a word from him in reply. At last—about a year ago—we discovered that he had married a Protestant and evidently did not want us to know. Even then my mother wrote very kindly to him, begging him to have the chil-

Favours

dren brought up as Catholics. She also sent them gifts. Still no answer came from him.

To make a long story short, last Friday I started a novena to Sister Marie-Céline, praying that before the end of the novena my mother should receive a letter from my brother. You can imagine my gratitude yesterday morning when I received a letter from my mother in which she enclosed a nice letter to her from my brother, and one from his wife to my sister. May I ask you to thank Sister Marie-Céline with me, and beg her to intercede for my brother and his family?

(Signed) SISTER M. C.
(*Poor Clare Colettine*).

[*Letter No. 3*]

FROM A CONVENT SCHOOL,
FRANCE,
April 29, 1923.

VERY REVEREND MOTHER,

Last term I sent you fifty francs towards promoting the cause of your little Saint. This time I have pleasure in sending you a further sum of 130 francs in thanksgiving for the many graces she continues to obtain for us.

During Lent we organized a competition to promote greater keenness in work and prayer. The school was divided into three groups, representing the three religious orders of Carmelites, Ursulines and Poor Clares, the respective patronesses being Sister Teresa of the Child Jesus, Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart of Tournai, and Sister Marie-Céline.

Three times in succession the winning group was that of Marie-Céline. The others had therefore to

A Lily of the Cloister

pay a penalty in good deeds—any little act—which went to enrich the spiritual treasury of their particular group. . . .

This term we have our examinations, and having placed our studies under the protection of Sister Marie-Céline, we are hoping for success. May we then ask you most Reverend Mother if you would be kind enough to pray for this intention, especially on May 24 and July 23? On the first date thirty of us will go up for our elementary certificates in religious instruction, and on the second date ten more are due for another examination.

The younger boarders also ask your prayers that they may obtain their different certificates.

If Marie-Céline helps us, we hope to be able to send another small donation at the end of the year, as, having read her *Life* in the refectory, we love our dear little Saint more and more, for she often obtains for us even more favours than we ask. So we hope she may make us a little more holy too.

My parents in particular have a great devotion to Marie-Céline, and with reason, as through her a petition has been granted for which they have prayed for a very long time.

If I may I would like to ask you for a few more relics. Those we have won't go round. The school consists of 150 boarders and 60 day scholars. Up to now it has been principally the older boarders—of whom there are seventy—who have been devoted to Marie-Céline, but we are going to try and make her more known and loved among the junior boarders and the day scholars.

Please accept, most Reverend Mother, the respectful greetings of Marie-Céline's little secretary, and of all her companions.

SIMONE DELAPLANCHE.

Favours

[*Letter No. 4*]

MOST REVEREND MOTHER,

It is with pleasure that I add a few words to the children's letter to tell you that your little Saint seems to take our whole house under her special protection. Our Reverend Mother, who has been a great sufferer for some time past, has felt better from the day she began to wear a relic of Marie-Céline. Ever since then her health has gradually improved. Other members of the community have also received the graces they sought through Marie-Céline's intercession.

That is why we recommend ourselves with all our needs, spiritual and temporal, to your good prayers, dear Reverend Mother, and beg to remain, with our sincerest regards,

Yours in Jesus Christ,

L. LE PRIOL

(*Directrice*).

[*Letter No. 5*]

A client in an Irish Abbey writes under date May 22, 1923 :

DEAR REV. MOTHER ABBESS,

Just a few lines to let you know I have a great devotion to Sister Marie-Céline of the Presentation. I have had many favours and graces through her holy intercession. Would you send me a few leaflets, please? I would be very grateful for them. I am a postulant in this Franciscan Friary, where I am very happy and contented, and hope to be accepted as a lay brother in due course.

A Lily of the Cloister

Would you kindly ask the Poor Clares to pray for me that, God willing, I may succeed and persevere?

Yours in Christ,
C. W.

[*Letter No. 6*]

LANCASHIRE,
May 30, 1923.

A temporal favour has been received through the intercession of Sister Marie-Céline of the Presentation.

The recipient of this favour begs to record the fact and to express gratitude to the donor.

[*Letter No. 7*]

CONVENT SCHOOL,
FRANCE,
June 13, 1923.

DEAR REVEREND MOTHER,

It gives me great pleasure to send you the offerings which I have received for Sister Marie-Céline, who is making herself more and more known every day by all the graces, little and big, that she is obtaining here. Not only the pupils, but also their parents, pray to her, and they, too, send their offerings. A day or two ago an old pupil came to give our headmistress a note for 100 francs for Marie-Céline, in return for a great favour received through her intercession. One and all, we have the greatest confidence in her power. Therefore, in the name of all my companions, I thank her and you, very Reverend Mother, for having prayed for us during our examinations, which were crowned with splendid success. Of the thirty-five who went up for their certificates for religious knowledge,

Favours

thirty-five passed, and there were twenty distinctions. The two Canons who came from Vannes to hold the oral examinations congratulated us very warmly, and so we were all delighted.

The little ones have succeeded very well in their examinations for general knowledge and general instruction—only three failed out of thirty-six. So the little ones are beginning to know and to love Marie-Céline, and on their behalf I am going to ask you for some pictures—pictures with the relic, and pictures with the prayer. I am very greedy for pictures, very Reverend Mother, but then, you see, everybody wants them, and they help me so much in my work for my dear little Saint. Fancy, Reverend Mother, I hardly thought that I should write to you again before next year, and now I am so rich that I cannot delay in sending you this money (200 francs). The next time you receive a letter, the big examinations will have taken place for the final elementary certificates. And if Marie-Céline obtains plenty of successes for us, our headmistress will write to you herself and will send you the offerings of the pupils who have passed their examinations.

I shall be coming back to school next year as I am only fourteen. I am in the first division of the second class, and I hope to obtain my certificate next year. You may be sure that I shall still work for my dear little Saint, for I want to be her secretary as long as I am at school. Please do not forget, very Reverend Mother, to pray hard for us on July 23 and the following days, and to pray also for all the intentions recommended to me. Our headmistress asks me to give you her most respectful regards and to ask your prayers for the graces she hopes to obtain.

A Lily of the Cloister

Now I am going to make you smile, very Reverend Mother. About a week ago one of our mistresses, knowing our enthusiasm for Marie-Céline, said to us when it was pouring with rain—as indeed it has been all the summer—“If Marie-Céline will give us a week of fine weather I will believe in her power.” This was on the Sunday after Corpus Christi. Well ! although it had been raining all the morning, it cleared up beautifully in the afternoon. There was a long procession at Hennebout, and we all went to it. Not only that, but the whole week was fine, and we were delighted, because on Thursday we had an expedition and the weather for it was splendid.

Now I must close, very Reverend Mother, hoping soon to receive a reply, and assuring you of my deepest respect.

SIMONE DELAPLANCHE
(*Secretary of Marie-Céline*).

The following testimonies come from the Island of Martinique, West Indies :

[*Letter No. 8*]

CONGREGATION OF OUR LADY OF
LA DÉLIVRANDE,
MORNE ROUGE,
MARTINIQUE,
WEST INDIES,
May 31, 1901.

REVEREND MOTHER,

Your little Saint has befriended us on several occasions. All our pupils invoke her, and we lend her photographs and relics to all the sick in the town. To-day one of these is fully convalescent ; the other is better ; and a small child is feeling the benefit of having invoked her. A little girl, who had been

Favours

given up by three doctors, has been cured by the relic, after her mother had promised that the child should wear the colours of the Poor Clare habit for a year. The Sisters of la Délivrande have great confidence in Sister Céline's intercession. We all pray to her. Unfortunately we have no more relics. I beg of you therefore to send us as many as you can. Could you send me a small photograph for myself? Small ones are printed in France at a small cost. I would like to have some for local distribution. I myself have not even a relic of her, having considered her glory rather than my own satisfaction. So you see, I have deprived myself generously. I feel sure that your dear and very Reverend Abbess will not refuse us. The smallest relic would be valued—even some of the dust from her grave. . . .

SISTER MARY OF THE INCARNATION.

MORNE ROUGE,
MARTINIQUE,
June 27, 1901.

VERY REVEREND MOTHER,

Thank you a thousand times for the relics you have been good enough to send me. Great devotion has resulted here by reading the Lives of your saints. And let me say once again, dear Reverend Mother, that during the epidemic of typhoid fever every patient to whom we lent a relic was cured! . . .

SISTER MARY OF THE INCARNATION
(*Daughter of our Lady of la Délivrande*).

1903.

Sister Margaret Mary, now a Poor Clare at Mons, relates the following incident :

One day another religious and I were reading the account, given in the Life of Sister Angelique, of

A Lily of the Cloister

the apparition of Sister Céline, when we noticed a delicious scent of heliotrope pervading the whole room. A similar experience also happened to Madame D—— R——, but in her case it was a powerful odour of incense. Not being able to account for it, she sent her servant to see whether anything was burning in the kitchen grate. But as the perfume grew stronger she discovered that the scent came from the little relic she was wearing. This perfume continued for half an hour.

Here is the account, as given to us, of the cure of a young man living at Morne Rouge, Martinique.

In the month of March, 1902, a young mulatto, who had been given up by the doctor, was dying of consumption. A religious of our Lady of la Délivrande, hearing of his hopeless condition, went to visit him with a view to preparing him for his first Communion, which he had not yet made.

The religious was well received by the dying man who placed himself under instruction. She was then prompted to ask Sister Céline to obtain his cure, and having given the sick man a little sachet containing a piece of her clothing, she put him under Sister Céline's protection. From that instant the poor sufferer felt immediate relief, his pain disappeared, and in a few days' time he was perfectly cured.

Full of gratitude to the religious for her charity towards him, this young man—who was an artist—wished to paint her portrait, but the Sister, giving him a photograph of Marie-Céline, said to him: “This is the Sister who obtained your cure from God. Instead of painting my portrait, I would prefer you to do one of your heavenly benefactress.”

Favours

The artist gladly began his task, but the great flood of May 8, 1902, caused him to relinquish his labour. He left Morne Rouge to escape from the terrible volcano, and on his return he is believed to have perished in the catastrophe of August 30, 1902.

(Signed) Sister M.M.

CONVENT OF THE HOLY NAME OF JESUS,
PORT OF SPAIN,
TRINIDAD,
WEST INDIES,
January 29, 1903.

VERY REVEREND MOTHER,

I am now able to tell you of some of the graces obtained through your saintly Sister. I have sent one of her relics . . . to a lady who has been paralyzed for two years. She tells me that since wearing this relic she feels a sensible improvement. She now sits up in bed, and has even written to me, which she has not been able to do for a long time. Without waiting for the completion of the miracle, I am now fulfilling the promise I made to Sister Marie-Céline, of making nineteen Communions and of offering the same number of Masses in thanksgiving, this being the number of years she passed on earth.

The father of one of our Sisters, who is a great sufferer from asthma, and to whom we gave a relic, has been cured since wearing it. More than this, he has noticed a sweet perfume being exhaled from the relic.

(Signed) SISTER MARIE DE LA RÉSURRECTION.

Here is an account related by Sister Margaret Mary of a conversion wrought through the intercession of Sister Céline.

A Lily of the Cloister

MORNE ROUGE,
MARTINIQUE,
1901.

Monsieur Gerodias was a veteran of the Crimean War, where he had gained a decoration for valour. He was now an old man of eighty, but being clever at various trades he earned his living, in spite of his advanced age, by doing odd jobs about the town. He was also employed at the church for repairs. But apart from his skill as a craftsman he was known in the town for his evil ways.

A religious of our Lady of la Délivrande, Sr. Marie de l'Enfant Jésus, had tried several times, without success, to bring him back to God. It then occurred to her to invoke Sister Céline on his behalf, and with renewed courage she spoke to him again. Though he remained as obstinate as before, he consented to carry in his purse a little relic of Sister Céline. The result was so speedy that the religious had hardly got back to her Convent when Gerodias rang at the bell.

"Here I am, Sister," he said. "I am in your hands. Do anything you like with me."

The religious was so taken aback by this sudden work of grace that she dared not believe it, so she then spoke to him of the necessity of confession.

"Yes, Sister," replied the old soldier, "I will go to confession, and I want to go to Father Mary, for I have spoken much evil of him. I want to repair it." And he added, "There is another thing, I am poor, and I have a debt of twenty-five francs which troubles me. If I were clear of that I would be happy."

The Sister told him not to trouble himself on this score, as she would see to it for him; and as she

Favours

was on her way to the church to tell Father Mary the glad news of the old man's conversion, a lady stopped her, and put the sum of twenty-five francs into her hand. "This is for your poor," she said, and the Sister, feeling it was indeed heaven sent, was filled with gratitude.

Father Mary, having heard the Sister's account of Gerodias, refused to take it seriously. "Gerodias is laughing at you," he said. "I know him only too well. You will see!" But he consented to hear the old man's confession, should he come. And Gerodias came, and with sincere repentance he confessed his long wanderings. Deeply touched by his penitent's contrition of heart, Father Mary welcomed the lost sheep with tenderness. Subsequently Gerodias went through a course of instruction for his first Communion, and finally he made the usual three days' preliminary retreat with wonderful fervour. The day of his first Communion was a feast day for the whole parish.

Everyone was moved at the sight of this old soldier coming from the sacred Banquet, wearing his war medal, and with his face radiant with joy.

"Ah!" he often said afterwards, "if I had known how good it was to serve God, I would always have served him."

Sister Céline has so often manifested her power by her intercession for sinners that we must include one more account of a conversion, out of the many received.

A Poor Clare writes: In a little town not far from Mons a notorious sinner was dangerously ill. A priest had already been several times to hear his confession, but the sick man persistently refused to receive him. A lady whom he knew, came to visit

A Lily of the Cloister

him, and she had an inspiration to bring a picture of Sister Céline, together with a small fragment of the habit worn by her. This friend proposed that he should make a novena to Sister Céline to obtain his recovery, adding that in order to make it well, he must conclude it by receiving holy Communion. To this the sick man answered : “ Novena, yes ! but holy Communion, *no !* ” The lady then placed in his hand the little picture and relic of Sister Céline. No sooner had she done so than she noticed to her great astonishment that his expression of face changed, and she felt certain that God had touched his heart. It was at this precise moment that the priest was led once more to visit the sick man.

“ Father,” said the lady, “ our patient is going to make a novena to Sister Céline, and I have just been telling him that he must bring it to a close by confession and Holy Communion.” “ Why not *now ?* ” interrupted the dying man. And so indeed he did. He made his confession and received Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction in the best of dispositions, to the wonder and amazement of all those who knew him.

The latest testimony, dated June 23, 1923, has just come to hand. The letter is as follows, and is given in full :

DE ROBERTSART,
June 23, 1923.

VERY REV. MOTHER,

May Sister Céline be glorified ! I have been completely cured by means of her sweet intercession. On March 15, 1922, I had a fall, as a result of which my left knee was badly sprained, a muscle was torn, and water on the knee developed.

Favours

After six weeks' rest the water on the knee was cured, but I still suffered very much and walked with difficulty. A Parisian specialist, whom we consulted at Lille, on December 15, certified that I was lame and that my left leg was one inch shorter than the other. After having thoroughly examined me the doctor exclaimed: "Madam, I fear this child is going to lose her leg."

Certainly it was very wasted.

Shortly after this my hip and spinal column were X-rayed, but Dr. Leclerq, of Valenciennes, who took the X-ray photo, did not find any curvature.

I was then sent to Berck-Plage, where for a week they treated my leg by trying to extend it. They then put it in plaster of Paris.

From the day of my accident I had put all my trust in Sister Céline, and we had made novena after novena to this dear little Poor Clare. We expected everything from Heaven, for what could doctors do without the help of God?

At the end of three weeks I asked the doctor to take off the plaster of Paris. This he did, while refusing all responsibility. He said "it was a case that required at least six months' treatment."

But on the removal of the plaster it was found that I was cured and able to return home. The doctor could hardly credit it, and expressed a wish to see me again in three months' time. Accordingly I went to see him again on the 10th of this month (June). He examined me thoroughly, and on being asked if he still found any sign of the original trouble, he replied: "No, certainly not. I can only say once more that it is a complete cure."

My family's gratitude to Marie-Céline knows no bounds.

A Lily of the Cloister

Very gladly, very Reverend Mother, do I send you these details of this new favour obtained by Sister Céline, and I shall be only too happy if it hastens her glorification even in the smallest degree.

I beg you to accept, very Reverend Mother, the assurances of my most profound respect.

(Signed) L. GIRARD.

The foregoing favours are only a few of the many obtained through the intercession of Sister Céline since her death in 1897—just twenty-six years ago.

N.B.—Anyone who receives graces or favours through the intercession of the servant of God, Marie-Céline of the Presentation, is asked to make known the same at the Monastery of the Poor Clares, 125, Rue de Nimy, Mons, Belgium. They will be of service in the process of the Beatification of the humble servant of God, whilst we await the pleasure of holy Church in acclaiming her as our intercessor with the Most High.

We shall be most grateful to the persons who are willing to send an offering to help us towards the expenses of the introduction of the cause of Sister Marie-Céline in Rome.

Photos and pictures may be had at the same address. Pictures 2d. and 6d. each ; 100, 8s. 4d., 33s. 4d. Photos, 3s. 6d. each, 8s. 6d. each. Postcards, 100, 10s. 6d.

71699

BOSTON COLLEGE



3 9031 01378619 9

71699

AUTHOR

TITLE

SISTER CELINE

BOSTON COLLEGE LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS
CHESTNUT HILL, MASS.

Books may be kept for two weeks and may be renewed for the same period, unless reserved.

Two cents a day is charged for each book kept overtime.

If you cannot find what you want, ask the Librarian who will be glad to help you.

The borrower is responsible for books drawn on his card and for all fines accruing on the same.



